The Kings of Nothing at All

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/14982260.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Original Graham-Lecter Child(ren), Alana Bloom, Margot Verger, Morgan Verger
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Omega Will Graham, Alpha Hannibal Lecter, Mpreg, Mating Cycles/In Heat, Mating Bites, Murder, Dark Will Graham, Bottom Will Graham, Top Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham is a Cannibal, Kid Fic, Alternate Universe - Children, Kidnapping, Psychological Trauma, Emotional/Psychological Abuse, Emotional Manipulation, Hostage Situations
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of A Legacy by Design
Collections:	Read_this_next, Hannibal
Stats:	Published: 2018-06-20 Completed: 2019-01-24 Words: 105,908 Chapters: 18/18

The Kings of Nothing at All

by HigherMagic

Summary

Sequel to "The First of His Kind" - “My name is Adam Lecter. My father is the Chesapeake Ripper, and you better hope he’s the one who finds you, because at least he’ll make your death quick. My mother…well…my mother makes no such promises."

Years after Hannibal and Will fled to Italy, their children are grown and starting their new lives. When their youngest child, Adam, gets kidnapped by a bunch of would-be killers, he knows his parents and sisters will stop at nothing to rescue him. He just has to survive that long.

Notes

"Why, Rowan," I hear the crowd murmur, "what brought this on?"

I had planned a sequel to "First" pretty much immediately after finishing it, and as previously stated, I have absolutely NO self control when it comes to ABO or protective!Will. So, here goes nothing!

This fic will have elements of abuse consistent with kidnapping, as well as subtle grooming elements of minors because Hannibal and Will want to make sure that their children are capable of surviving in this world, especially the unique kind when one's parents are both cannibalistic serial killers. I do want to say, unequivocally, that Hannibal and Will love their children very much, even if it's a 'Tough Love' kind of situation at times.

I will warn and tag for individual things as they come up, but please also feel free to message me on Tumblr or here if you have any questions or concerns before reading. There's nothing terrible in this chapter, but you should be able to get a feel for the kind of thing you're in for.

Since "First" took place outside of canon, I've taken my liberties with their ages. Will is in his late forties (fifteen years after "First" ended), Hannibal in his early fifties. Mischa and Shannon are both 18, and Adam is about to turn 16.

Title taken from Walk The Moon's "One Foot".

I hope you guys like it! It's going to be an interesting ride :D

Chapter 1

"One paperclip, two inches long. Three rubber bands – green, yellow, blue. Blue was the thickest. One ballpoint pen, black ink, half-full. One yellow Snapple bottle lid."

"What was the quote inside the lid?"

"Trick question. It was face-up." Will smiles. "One red crayon."

"Which red?"

"I…" Will's eyes meet and hold those of his son, the whiskey-brown of his father's irises blinking back at him. They narrow under a set of dark eyebrows, and Adam huffs, looks down at the cloth-covered tray, and closes his eyes. "I don't remember."

"That's okay," Will replies. "You got everything else right."

Adam shakes his head, runs his fingers through the mop of light brown hair that had fallen across his forehead, and rolls his shoulders forward with another frustrated huff. He straightens and glares down at the tray of items as Will uncovers them again.

"Sunset Orange," he says, reading the name on the crayon, and Will nods. Adam's jaw flexes and Will's attention is drawn as they hear a grunt to his left, and Adam's right. He turns, watching as Hannibal spars with their middle child, Shannon. She's the shortest of their three children, even though Adam isn't yet sixteen, and her hair falls in wild waves down her back – she doesn't tie it back when she spars with her father. Hannibal has always insisted that she train to fight when at her most physically vulnerable. That means potential handholds.

Will observes in silence, his elbows on his knees as he watches Hannibal spar with their daughter. Shannon's round cheeks are flushed with exertion, there's sweat on her forehead and darkening her shirt under her arms and around her neck. Hannibal is sweating, as well – they have been play-fighting most of the morning, well before Adam and Will joined them in the room to for their observation and memory exercises.

Shannon lunges for Hannibal, growling when he grabs her wrist and twists her arm behind her, hauling her arm up to threaten dislocating her shoulder. He wraps his other hand in her hair, jerking her head back, her throat bared. He puts his teeth to her neck in the killing blow and, after a moment, her shoulders go lax and his threat of a bite turns into a kiss at her temple, and he lets her go with a pleased purr.

"You're getting stronger," he tells her, soft with affection.

She blows a lock of hair out of her face, and then gathers her hair to tie it up. "Still lost," she replies, breathing hard, sullen.

Hannibal smiles, and holds his arms out to her when she's done tying her hair up, wisps flying wayward around her face, the rest in a bun at her neck. She goes to him eagerly, her

head tucked neatly under his chin as he hugs her tightly. Even from here, Will can hear his purr. It's important for them, as Alpha and female, to re-cement their bond after every fight with physical affection. Although Shannon can't hear his purr as intimately as Will and Adam can, she still feels it in his chest when he does it.

Adam huffs, clucking his tongue at the side of his mouth. "When do I get to start fighting?" he asks.

Will laughs, turning his attention back to his son. Except for his darker hair, Adam is the spitting image of Hannibal – a fact he knows pleases the Alpha immensely. He has Hannibal's profile, his eyes, and his build is much like Will imagines Hannibal's was, when he was younger. He certainly lacks Will's slenderness from his youth. He'll grow into a fine Alpha after he presents.

"Soon, my little hunter," he says fondly. "Your sisters didn't start training until they'd physically matured."

Adam frowns at him. "I remember them sparring since I was a kid," he says.

Will's smile softens, and he swallows back the urge to tell him that he still is a kid. He'll always be Will's little boy. "Statistically," he begins, "Mischa and Shannon are more likely to be attacked than you will ever be."

Adam's eyes darken. He knows what Will is saying without him having to say it – all of their children inherited their parents' sharp, keen eyes. "I'm more likely to be the aggressor," he says, fingers curling on his thighs.

"But also, the protector," Will replies. "Learning how to observe everything in a split second is the kind of thing that will save lives."

Adam nods, once, sharply, so keenly like his father that for a moment Will can't breathe. It's impossible to properly describe how much, how deeply, he loves his family – how grateful he is to Hannibal that he can have one.

He stands and circles the little table on which the tray sits, perches on the arm of Adam's chair and pulls him into a hug. Adam starts to purr immediately, rubbing his nose at Will's waist. "If I was Omega, you'd teach me to fight," he says.

Will smiles. "I'd teach you a lot of things specific to my breed," he replies, and leans down to kiss the top of his son's head. He breathes in deeply, Adam's pine cone and minty scent, much like his own, filling his lungs. Adam inherited his scent more than his father's. "And I still will, but first I would have you learn to see, before you react."

Adam huffs. "I don't know what that means."

Will smiles, and looks up when a shadow darkens his vision at his side. He lifts his head and tilts his chin up, meets Hannibal's red-tinged irises. Hannibal is holding Shannon's hand, and with the other he pets Will's hair back from his face in a gentle touch.

"Perhaps we should demonstrate," he suggests.

Will's smile turns sharp, and he stands.

Hannibal lets go of Shannon and she sits where Will was, across from Adam on his chair. Will nuzzles Hannibal's shoulder as Hannibal leads him a few steps away, his hand drops to Will's nape, thumb brushing the mating bite on the back of his neck, and Will shivers.

"You know your mother loves me, and trusts me, don't you, Adam?"

"Yes," Adam replies, nodding, his eyes wide. Will's eyelids flutter closed as Hannibal's hand spreads out wide on the back of his neck. Even after all this time, the way Hannibal touches him makes his chest feel warm, his knees weak. He turns and presses his nose to Hannibal's neck, breathing in his Alpha's musky scent, paper and candle wax and red meat. He's sharp with sweat and the heat in his hands is blistering on Will's skin.

"And you also know I would never do anything to harm him," Hannibal says. His voice has gotten lower, his other hand presses flat and wide on Will's flank. Will trembles, arching against his chest. He doesn't see Adam nod, but he must, because Hannibal kisses Will's forehead and lets him go and Will takes a step back, fingers curling, and lowers himself into a slight crouch.

Hannibal's eyes meet his, and his smile is wide. Will answers it with one of his own. Hannibal is capable of great cruelty – Will knows that, he's experienced it firsthand. He knows what it feels like for Hannibal to claw marks in his thighs, bite deep bruises onto his chest, mount him so brutally he can barely walk after the fact. He's forced his Alpha to such a state before.

Hannibal looks to their children. "Close your eyes," he says. Will knows better than to take his eyes off his mate, to be certain he's obeyed. As he watches, Hannibal's demeanor changes, from fond affection to cold-blooded intent. He's a predator now, and he looks at Will like his next kill. Will shivers at the heat in his eyes and lets Hannibal circle him, to the eleven o'clock point, before he starts in the opposite direction.

"Listen," Hannibal tells their children. "What do you hear? And smell?"

A pause. "Nothing," Adam says, sounding confused.

Will meets his mate's eyes. He nods, licks his lips, and lets out a plaintive whine. It's a sweet, desperate sound – the kind an Omega would make when begging for an Alpha's mercy.

He hears Adam suck in a breath and Hannibal smiles, but doesn't take his eyes off Will. He knows better, too. "Keep your eyes closed, Adam," he commands. Will whines again, forces his body to go tense and trembling – not with heat, not with anticipation, but with fear. He hasn't felt fear, especially with Hannibal, for a long time, but he remembers it. He remembers how he'd felt when he first went into heat at Hannibal's cabin, the clawed and desperate feeling shredding his chest, the war between the desire to run to the Alpha and the overwhelming need to get away from him at the same time. Before he'd known. Before he'd seen.

His fingers shake, adrenaline flooding him in anticipation of Hannibal's attack. Hannibal continues to circle him, subtly tightening the shape and Will growls, baring his teeth in challenge. Hannibal answers in kind, too swept up from his spar with Shannon to remain calm. He lunges for Will and Will shies back, throws a punch that lands on Hannibal's shoulder and forces him to retreat.

Behind him, Will hears Adam whine. "Don't hurt my mother," he says.

"You know I wouldn't," Hannibal replies, voice lower now, snarling. Will loves how it sounds. "But that's not what your ears are telling you, is it? That's not what you smell."

"I hear you growling. I smell you. I smell fear," Adam replies.

Hannibal smiles, and straightens up. "That is because your mother is a very good actor," he says, proud and fond. Will smiles as well, and goes to Hannibal when he holds his hand out. He places his cheek in Hannibal's palm and lets Hannibal pull him close, purrs softly and buries his nose in Hannibal's sweaty neck.

The tension in the room dissipates, and Hannibal kisses Will's cheek. "And now?" he asks.

"Nothing," Adam replies.

"Open your eyes."

Will turns his head, meets his son's dark eyes, and Hannibal turns him in his arms, digs his claws into the side of Will's throat, hauls his head to one side so his throat is exposed and sets his teeth at Will's neck. Will shivers, and Adam goes tense in his seat.

"No fear," Hannibal murmurs. He kisses Will's pink skin. "I have my hand on your mother's throat. I could kill him, if I wanted to."

Adam's upper lip curls, and his eyes flash.

"How does that make you feel?"

"Angry," Adam says. "I'd kill you if you hurt him."

Will smiles. "You're reacting," he replies. "I'm not afraid. But, because you think I should be, you're prepared to fight to defend me."

Adam nods.

"That is why you must first learn to observe," Hannibal finishes. He releases Will's neck and kisses his temple, his hands gentling and settling on Will's shoulders. Will straightens up, leans against Hannibal's broad chest to feel the rumble of his purr. "You have both, and your older sister, been blessed with a predisposition and insight to the human condition. Your mother and I want you to know how to look, before you leap."

Adam stands, and Hannibal lets Will go as Adam approaches Will and lets Will wrap his arms around his shoulders. He's scenting Will, wanting to make sure he's not in any actual

distress, and Will smiles, lets Adam nuzzle his shoulder and bitten neck. Even so young, he's as tall as Will is, and likely still has some growing to do. As an Alpha, Adam will be more sensitive to his mother's moods, especially as he nears sixteen, when he'll present.

Adam starts to purr, weakly, like he's trying to calm Will's distress even though there is none to calm. Will sighs, kissing his cheek and hugging him tightly. He looks at Hannibal, who is watching them with calm fondness, and Shannon stands as well with a loud sigh.

"I'm starving," she announces. "Are there any leftovers?"

Hannibal nods. "I believe we could both benefit from showers, first," he tells her, and she rolls her eyes but gives him a nod.

Will smiles, and lets Adam go. "Get washed up and we'll have lunch," he tells him, and Adam nods. Shannon takes his hand and walks them both out of the open room in which they practice sparring.

They left Italy when Mischa moved away for college, in England. She's attending university in Nottingham and, wanting to keep their family together, they'd moved to Harrogate so that they could be near her. Not so close that she cannot be independent, but close enough that, should they need to, they can go to her.

Their house is a standalone on the outskirts of the town – so called a town because it has neither a university nor a cathedral, but a population large enough to satisfy their needs. The house has a large backyard and trees that dip down to a river with a single-lane stone bridge, the only place to cross. Their house is especially large by English standards, made entirely of stone, and Will fell in love with it as soon as he saw it.

It's summertime, and the fields are bright and green, the sky an off-blue grey before the second heatwave, that typically comes in July. Will knows Shannon plans to attend the same university as her sister, and he has no problem believing she's gotten good enough A-level grades to attend, although they won't know officially until the middle of August.

Hannibal takes him by the neck and kisses him and Will breathes in deeply, purring at the scent of his Alpha's sweat. "We'll have to train him to resist Omega sounds, soon," he tells Hannibal once they part, and head towards their bedroom.

Hannibal nods, pressing his lips together and letting out a hum of agreement. When their bedroom door closes, he pulls his sweat-stained t-shirt over his head, baring his chest. He tosses the shirt in their hamper as Will sits on their bed, his elbows on his knees, hands cradling his chin, admiring the view.

"He wants to learn how to fight," Will adds.

Hannibal smiles at him. "You're protective of him."

"I'm protective of all of my children," Will replies coolly. Hannibal raises an eyebrow, and Will sighs. "He's a lot like you."

"Projecting," Hannibal says fondly. He goes to the bathroom and Will follows, watching as Hannibal pulls the shower curtain back and sheds his sweatpants and underwear. "I think he's much more like you, than me."

Will sighs. Hannibal steps into the shower and closes the curtain, and the water starts. Will leans against the bathroom counter, folding his arms across his chest, his eyes on his bare feet.

After a moment, the curtain moves, and Hannibal pokes his head out, his eyebrows raised. "I know that look," he says.

Will rolls his eyes, smiling fondly, and sheds his clothes quickly, stepping into the shower behind his mate. Hannibal immediately wraps his arms around Will, pulling him close so they're both under the spray of the warm water. Will shivers, nuzzling the mating bite he placed to Hannibal's chest. To this day, he doesn't have a mark on his neck. Will likes darkening and deepening this one, re-opens it occasionally when he's feeling particularly brash.

"I just know the odds," Will finally admits, as Hannibal pets through his hair with both hands. Will closes his eyes and lets his mate turn him, bites his lower lip when Hannibal lets go for just long enough to grab some shampoo. He puts his hands back in Will's hair, working it up to a lather and gently massaging Will's head and neck. "I look at him, and all I see are numbers. Statistics. Given our natures…"

"You're afraid he'll end up like me?" Hannibal murmurs. It's not said with offense.

"I want him to be happy," Will says. "I want him to find a mate, and have a family. What are the odds that someone like him will find someone like me?"

"I found you," Hannibal replies.

Will nods, sighing again. Hannibal tilts his head forward, under the water, and thick streams of lather run down his chest and his legs, washing away down the drain. He runs his hands through his hair to get the rest of it out and circles Hannibal so that he can do the same with his own hair. He reaches for the body wash and a washcloth, squirts a heavy dollop of the wash onto it and rubs the wet towel together, folds it between his fingers and drags it over Hannibal's shoulders.

"Your desire to see yourself as something unique wars with your need to see your son happily mated," Hannibal says, scratching his fingers over his scalp as he clears his hair of the shampoo.

Will huffs. "Well, it's not like killer Omegas are a dime a dozen," he replies. "And our children inherited your appetites." He pauses. "Mischa's careful about it, at least, but Adam is…reckless."

"He's still young," Hannibal says calmly. He turns, and Will bites his lower lip, flattening the washcloth and rubbing the body wash over Hannibal's chest and stomach. He meets his mate's eyes, finds them dark with adoration. "We both were, once."

Will grins at him. "I'm still young," he replies, lifting his chin in challenge.

Hannibal smiles, wide enough to show his teeth. He cups Will's hands, laces their fingers together around the washcloth. "That you are," he murmurs. He lets Will's hands go, steps closer and wraps a hand in Will's hair, the other settling into place on his hip. "Still young." He leans in, kisses Will's neck, and Will shivers, fingers clenching. "Still beautiful, as always."

"Doctor Lecter," Will breathes, half-chiding, low as Hannibal's hand spreads out wide on his skin, circles his hip and flattens at the base of his spine. There's a pressure point there, something that triggers a feeling of calm and pliancy in Omegas. Hannibal took painstaking care to learn and memorize every place like that on Will, and they passed that knowledge to their children. His stomach tightens, and he shivers, eyes going half-lidded at the placative touch. "Your children are hungry."

"And you, darling?" Hannibal says, low and pleased when Will trembles in his arms. Hannibal's fingers knot in his hair, drawing him closer, crushing Will's hands between their chests. "Are you hungry?"

Will bites his lower lip, blinks once, slowly. He had wanted to wait, knowing the statistics for someone his age, but -. "That hunger was sated a month ago," he replies.

Hannibal goes still, and draws back. The water rushes down his face and he lets go of Will's spine, rubbing his wet hair out of his eyes. Will smiles, bites his lower lip, and presses a hand to his own stomach, low.

Hannibal's eyes go wide. "Are you -?"

Will nods, swallowing harshly when Hannibal's eyes flash with red. "Yes," he replies, and then laughs. "I'm surprised you didn't smell it."

Hannibal swallows, and shuts off the water. There are still clumps of body wash on his skin, but he doesn't seem to notice, or care. He takes Will by his hair and pulls him into a deep kiss, and Will laughs, dropping the washcloth at their feet so he can plant his hands on Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal kisses him, rough, passionately, his teeth in Will's lower lip in a sharp bite that makes Will tremble and feel hot, and then he pulls back and shoves his nose against Will's neck, breathing deeply. "*Oh*," he whispers, his exhale warm on Will's neck. Will shivers, closing his eyes and resting his forehead on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal's purr is loud, shaking his entire body.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" he asks against Will's neck.

"I wanted to be sure," Will replies. He shrugs, and Hannibal pulls back, resting their foreheads together. "I know the odds for someone my age carrying to term, so I wanted to make sure."

Hannibal sighs, carding his fingers through Will's hair one more time. "We should start you on a vitamin supplement and get you to a doctor's as soon as possible," he says. Will huffs, smiling. "And we should call Mischa – this warrants a celebration."

"No," Will replies, shaking his head. "I don't want to tell the children, yet."

"You don't think they'll be happy?"

Will frowns, pressing his lips together. "It's not that," he replies. He pulls away from Hannibal, drawing the curtain back, and steps out, grabbing them both a towel. He hands Hannibal one and wraps the other around his head, drying his hair with short, brisk movements. "I just don't want to get them excited if…something happened."

He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him, and keeps his gaze fixed on the bathroom counter as he rubs the towel over his shoulders, down his back, around his thighs, drying himself off quickly.

Finally, Hannibal sighs. "Very well," he replies. "But you had three easy pregnancies and uncomplicated births. I see no reason to think there is a higher risk now."

"I'm older," Will says.

"And still in excellent physical condition," Hannibal finishes mildly.

Will rolls his eyes, and hangs the towel back on the rack. "Humor me," he says, and Hannibal meets his eyes, his expression more exasperated than anything else. "Please?" Will adds, for good measure.

Hannibal smiles, his shoulders sagging, and he nods. "How can I ever resist you?" he murmurs.

Will laughs. "You can't," he replies, proudly. "That's how we ended up here in the first place."

"A set of events I would not change, at any point." Will sighs, closing his eyes when Hannibal's warm hand flattens gently on his shoulder. They leave the bathroom and go back into their bedroom, donning a fresh set of clothes – Will in lounge pants and a t-shirt, Hannibal in suit pants and a button-down the color of red wine. Hannibal comes to him once they're dressed, kisses Will deeply, one hand flat on his stomach. "I wonder if you'll give me an Omega, this time."

Will laughs against his mouth. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he says warmly, but can't deny the shiver of pleasure that Hannibal's voice brings. Hannibal kisses his cheek, his neck, and wraps his free arm around Will's waist, forcing them closer together as he takes another deep breath of Will's scent.

He hums, nuzzling Will's jaw. "I can smell it, now," he replies. "I had thought it was the English weather, making you sweeter."

"It's been a long time since I smelled this way," Will murmurs.

Hannibal sighs, and pulls back to place one more kiss to Will's forehead. "I'll have to go hunting, soon," he tells Will. "You're eating for two, now."

"Stop," Will growls, blushing and shoving playfully at his mate. Hannibal smiles and Will rolls his eyes, taking Hannibal's hand and leading him out of their bedroom, down the hall that's dark with wooden paneling and thick red carpet. Will has often wondered if Hannibal specifically chose that color so that it hides stains better.

Sometimes they let their prey run.

They find Shannon and Adam in the dining room, which is a small, intimate room, with a dining table almost too large for it. There are no shelves, but a picture window that allows a full view of the back garden. The sky is bright, as the days are long in the summer, and Will takes a seat at Hannibal's right hand as he always has. Across from him is Mischa's normal place, but Adam sits there when she's away. Shannon is at Will's right.

Hannibal smiles at his pack, and raps his knuckles against the wood. "Shannon, come help me with lunch," he says, and she stands with another nod, her hair flat and black with water, wrapped into a side braid that runs down her neck.

She follows the Alpha out, leaving Will and Adam alone in the room. Adam has his phone out, the bright screen illuminating his pale face and dark eyes. Will can see the reflection of text messages in his pupils. He smiles, sitting back in his chair, and idly wonders if Hannibal will still try and feed him wine, to trick him into admitting he's pregnant before he's ready.

Adam looks up, and sets his phone down. He meets Will's eyes. Holds them – not challenging. They like to watch each other.

Adam blinks, and tilts his head to one side. He lifts his chin and his lips part, scenting the air. Will raises an eyebrow. "You smell happy," he says.

Will smiles. "Don't I always?" he replies.

"Well, yes," Adam says, his cheeks coloring to a rosy pink. He smiles, lopsided, showing his teeth. He smiles like Will does. He drums his fingers against the table, and his phone vibrates with a text message. He picks it up immediately.

Will smiles, humming, and nods to the phone. "Someone special?" he asks.

Adam's cheeks darken. "Maybe," he replies, typing his reply away and setting his phone down again. He sighs, running a hand through his unruly hair. He didn't shower, but Will can smell hand soap. "Her name's Helena, she's in my biology and geography courses." Will nods. The British education system is vastly different from the American one, but he likes it a lot more. Adam is in the second year of GCSE's, he'll go into his A-levels this autumn, and will have his courses narrowed down to four or five subjects.

Of course, between Will and Hannibal, they'll make sure he learns everything he needs to know about the world to survive, but Hannibal had been educated in Europe and Will trusts that Adam will thrive within it.

"Is she pretty?" Will asks, grinning when Adam blushes again, shifting his weight.

"She's beautiful," Adam breathes, his eyes shining. His phone vibrates again, and he picks it up, his smile softening at the corners as he texts her back. It reminds Will a lot of how Hannibal looks at him, in the quiet moments before dawn when it's just the two of them curled up together under their sheets. His chest grows warm with affection.

"Are you gonna ask her out?"

Adam scoffs, and shakes his head. "No," he replies. "I mean. Not yet, at least."

Will cocks his head to one side.

"I want to be a good Alpha," Adam says, his fingers curled as he sets down his phone again. "The best Alpha. I need to be able to protect her and provide for her. I can't do that yet." He sets his jaw and nods, determined-looking. "When I'm ready. When you and father think I'm ready."

Will swallows, his throat tight. "You make me so proud, little hunter," he says, and Adam smiles in that way children do when their mothers show them affection in public. He ducks his head and Will leans across the table, taking his hand. "The fact that you're already aware of that need, that you want to be the best version of yourself for her, that tells me you're ready for the next step in your training."

Adam blinks at him, straightening up in eagerness. "Really?"

Will smiles. The door to the kitchen opens and Shannon comes inside with a tray full of glasses of water, and four plates with sets of silverware, and she sets the tray down in her space and starts to hand them out. Hannibal follows with a baking dish, the scents of cheese and red sauce filling the air as he sets it on the table protector between Will and Adam.

He smiles at Will and Will returns it, before he picks up a large spatula and slices the edge through the lasagna, portioning out a serving for each of them. When they're ready to eat, he takes his seat.

Hannibal has always kept his family very well fed, and this is no exception, but when Will takes a deep breath in anticipation of eating, the scent of melted cheese hits his nose, the onions and béchamel sauce fills his mouth, and his stomach abruptly turns.

He takes a drink of water to try and hide the reaction, but of course, his family notices. They all have keen eyes.

"Are you okay, mama?" Shannon asks, settling her hand on Will's.

"I'm fine," Will replies. He takes his fork with his free hand, glaring when it looks like Hannibal is trying to hide his smirk. He scoops up a bite of the lasagna and tries to eat it, but he can't even put the fork in his mouth before his stomach twists sharply again and he visibly heaves.

Adam blinks at him, his eyes wide, and he lifts his chin to scent the air again.

Hannibal does smile, this time. "Can I make you something else, darling?" he asks.

Will blushes, and shakes his head. He busies himself with peeling the layer of cheese back from the top of the lasagna and takes a tentative bite of just meat and pasta. That, at least, he manages to eat without complaint.

He raises an eyebrow and looks to Hannibal in challenge, and gets only a ghost of a satisfied smile in return.

Shannon squeezes his hand, and turns her attention back to her meal. She sighs. "When's Mischa coming home?"

"I believe her last exam is next week," Hannibal replies. "She told me she'd be here a week from Sunday." He pauses. "She's bringing her boyfriend."

Will raises an eyebrow, humming into his next bite. "That's a big step," he says mildly.

Hannibal smiles. "You must be gentle with him, darling," he says.

"Me? What about you?"

Shannon makes a noise like she's trying to stifle her laughter, and grins at Will when he looks at her. "Come on, mama, you're much more frightening than dad is."

"Is that so?" Will asks, other eyebrow rising to join the first. "I can't imagine how."

"You're her mother," Hannibal says, gentle and affectionate. Will glares at him. "Your opinion will mean a lot to him, especially as an Alpha."

"You know, where I grew up, we feared our daddy's shotgun more than our mom," Will says.

Hannibal laughs. "I think it's more of the fact that an Alpha father is stereotypically threatening and imposing," he says. "Omegas are…less predictable. And I doubt Mischa has cast you in a particularly submissive or dainty light."

Will frowns. "Still," he says, petulant though he's not sure why. He certainly doesn't want Mischa to feel like she can't bring boyfriends or girlfriends home – but, coupled with that, is the desire to absolutely assert that Mischa is not to be toyed with and if she can't do that herself, Will certainly can. If Hannibal doesn't get to the boy first. He thinks of sitting out on the front porch with Hannibal's butcher knife in hand, and smiles despite himself. "I'll behave if you will," he adds, tilting his head and smiling Hannibal's way.

"Best behavior all round," Hannibal replies with a nod. But he's smiling, too, and Will wonders if he's thinking about what meals he'd make from the boy's flesh should he prove less than satisfactory for their eldest daughter. Will trusts Mischa's instincts – he and Hannibal made sure they were sharp and refined – but love, as they say, is blind.

They finish their meal and Will follows Hannibal into the kitchen to help clear the plates. Shannon has a test to study for on Monday and Adam goes to his room, likely to continue talking to Helena. Will smiles, his hands sunk deep into the full sink as he washes the plates and hands them to Hannibal to dry.

"I think Adam should start the next part of his training," he says, idly rubbing a wet, soapy sponge over a plate before he rinses it and hands it off. "He's getting much better with his snap observation exercises."

Hannibal presses his lips together, nodding. "Do you think he's ready?"

"I think he's bored," Will replies. "Same thing."

Hannibal smiles, leaning in to nuzzle Will's damp hair, place a brief kiss to his cheek when Will turns his head, seeking one. "This part will be different than it was with Mischa, and Shannon," he says, like Will doesn't already know. There are instincts in Alphas that they must overcome, that are not present in women. Their daughters do not react and submit to Omega whines and Alpha growls, nor do they run the risk of being overpowered by Voices, but Adam can.

"I know," Will says. He sighs, looking back down into the sink, and starts to clean another plate. "Are you worried for my constitution?"

"Not at all," Hannibal replies mildly, taking the plate from Will once it's rinsed.

Will waits for him to add to the declaration, for he's sure that's not all Hannibal is thinking, but Hannibal remains silent, and Will bites his lower lip, determined not to ask first. He can be patient – he's a fisherman, always has been, and he can wait for days for Hannibal to bite, if he has to.

Hannibal finally sighs, as the last plate is handed to him and Will drains the sink, wiping his hands on a towel. "I know you, darling," he says quietly, setting the last plate in the cabinet and folding the towel by the sink. "Adam's training may conjure feelings in you that you are…particularly sensitive to, in your current state."

Will's upper lip twitches, and he sets his hands on the side of the counter, bracing himself there. "You think being pregnant makes me weak?" he asks, soft and cutting.

"No," Hannibal says firmly. He takes Will's hand and Will turns, reluctantly, wanting to hold onto his anger. He meets his mate's eyes and finds them dark and sincere, and Hannibal kisses his knuckles. "On the contrary, it makes you all the more fierce. We're going to have to be very cruel to him, and I don't want you to suffer secondhand."

"I can handle it," Will growls, eyes flashing. "I can handle you."

Hannibal smiles. "I know, darling," he murmurs. Will's fingers flex, curling around his jaw, and Will digs his nails in, pulls him close and turns them so Hannibal's weight is pressing him against the counter. Hannibal's hands settle on his hips, wide and warm, his eyes flash with red and Will smiles.

Hannibal's scent is turning sharper, burning Will's nose when he breathes in. He leans in close, touches their noses together and lets their lips brush in a tease of a kiss. Hannibal's mouth parts, his eyes go heavy-lidded, but Will denies him a kiss. For now. "And what about you, Doctor Lecter?" Will whispers, growling the words, pleased when Hannibal shivers. "Can you handle me?"

"I can certainly try," Hannibal replies, soft and low. His hands tighten on Will's hips, tugging him closer until they're touching, chest to knee. He smiles.

Will hums, tilts his lead to one side and licks the corner of Hannibal's mouth, pleased when Hannibal turns his head to try and chase him. Will tightens his hand on Hannibal's neck, forcing him to remain still. He feels Hannibal's shoulders go tense, instinctively fighting the presumptive touch on his neck. It's the touch of a predator, which Will is, as much as his mate. The crash and collide together like water on cliffs.

"Even after so long," Will purrs, kissing Hannibal's jaw. "I touch you, and you tremble."

"Always," Hannibal replies, the word barely more than an exhale. Will can smell Hannibal's arousal, cinnamon and cloves dragging along the roof of his mouth. He breathes in deeply.

"Your mate calls for you, Doctor Lecter," he says. "Will you answer?"

Hannibal snarls, his upper lip curling back to show his teeth. Will shivers, gasping when Hannibal's hand flies to his nape, tightens so that Will's knees go weak. He collapses against Hannibal's chest, whining softly, and Hannibal gathers him close and puts his teeth at Will's throat.

Will swallows harshly when Hannibal's jaws part over a fresh bruise on his neck, his teeth sink in and suck a new mark that blooms with heat and the sharp after point of pain they both love so much. He digs his nails into Hannibal's neck and growls, shoving him back so that Hannibal goes, stumbling, catching himself on the counter.

Will grins at him, snarling at the red in Hannibal's eyes, and runs to their bedroom.

Hannibal gives chase. He always does.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

wowza I'm sorry this took so long!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even with years separating the last time he felt this and now, Will remembers how different Hannibal is whenever he knows Will is pregnant. The Alpha has always been gentle with him, with the few notable exceptions of when Will drove him to a point beyond reason to further his own designs. That time is long-since passed, and they have had no need for it, taking out their mutual need for savagery on their hunts, and their kills, and in raising their children, instead of on each other.

And still, with that self-imposed threshold at their bedroom door where predators turn gentle and their claws and fangs go dull, when Will has been pregnant, Hannibal is all the more shaken by him. When Will touches him, Hannibal trembles and leans into him, whether it's a gentle brush of fingers over his mouth, or blunt nails raking down his back, or the sweet call of Will's slick when Hannibal presses him down and Will spreads his legs.

Will allows Hannibal to guide him to the bed, nuzzling and nudging at Will with his forehead, his nose, the corner of his jaw, until Will's thighs catch the edge and he sits, then crawls back, and Hannibal prowls into place over him. Hannibal cups the back of his neck and lifts him to his elbows, pulling him into a kiss that Will answers eagerly, thighs parting, knees spread wide in a motion well-practiced and well-known.

Hannibal's hand leaves his neck, both of them flattening wide and warm on Will's flanks, tucking under his shirt to push it over his head. Will lifts his arms to allow it, then throws his shirt off the side of the bed, onto the floor. He arches up, presses his hands flat on Hannibal's chest and kisses him deeply, slowly, coaxing Hannibal to his resting place between Will's thighs.

Hannibal shivers, drawing back so he can kiss Will's jaw, his bared neck. He drags his nose along the tendon framing Will's throat, kisses feather-light and open-mouthed at his shoulder where the old gunshot wound is, from the night they killed Jack. Will bites his lower lip, growling softly, his stomach clenching up and hot at the reminder of that day and night. Hannibal had mounted him brutally that morning, and played his part so well – just as they had been until that moment, and have been every moment since; two people bound and tied together like a rope and anchor. Like the cement that lies between stone and brick. Together, their foundation is solid and sure, and every move between them is clockwork and ocean tides.

Hannibal comes to a stop just past Will's navel, and he presses his face gently against Will's flat stomach, where memory and repetition has taught him is the place that will swell with his child. He breathes in deeply, his eyes closed, and Will pets through his hair with gentle touches, allowing his Alpha to soak in a quiet moment of deep pride, knowing he's managed to breed Will to the precipice of his fertility, knowing that his child is planted deep in his mate and will flourish under their care.

Will sits up, and takes Hannibal's head with him, drawing him into another kiss and Hannibal growls, lunging forward, but Will fights him, uses the momentum and the split-second of imbalance to turn them and throw his mate down onto the bed. He straddles Hannibal's thighs and grins at the flash of red in Hannibal's irises, and he takes Hannibal's wrists and forces them down onto the bed, plants his knees over them so Hannibal cannot move them unless he really tries.

Hannibal's eyes flash, bright in the relative darkness of their room, and Will smiles, sliding his hands up his mate's shoulders until he reaches the collar of Hannibal's button-down shirt. He starts to undo the buttons, slowly – not to tease, but simply to take his time. He is careful not to put too much pressure on Hannibal's wrists as he leans forward and rests their foreheads together, his hands continuing with their task.

Hannibal lifts his chin, seeking Will's mouth, and Will's smile widens, sharpens. He pulls back, denies his mate just to hear Hannibal growl, and leans in again. Hannibal's upper lip twitches when Will rears back again, denying him a second time. "What have I done to warrant such cruelty?" he asks, too softly to hide his amusement, his adoration when Will finishes with his shirt and shoves the halves to each side of Hannibal's torso, baring his chest and stomach.

"Cruelty?" Will repeats, light and mocking, teasing. "Maybe I just like having you at my mercy."

"An indulgence I have always granted you," Hannibal says, smiling.

Will laughs, raking his nails gently down his mate's chest, curling in the thick patch of hair over Hannibal's heart. "You've given me another child," he says, whisper-quiet, almost surprised at how harshly those words affect him. They make his throat feel tight, love and joy blossoming harshly in his chest. "I would see you rewarded for that."

He slides back, freeing Hannibal's wrists, but Hannibal keeps his hands where they are, and Will rewards him with a purr, leaning down and kissing Hannibal's stomach. His fingers move to Hannibal's belt and slacks, unbuckling the first and unfastening the second until he can reach in with a gentle hand and wrap his fingers around his Alpha's cock, pulling him free from his clothes.

Hannibal's stomach sinks in and Will admires the view, since he never gets it when Hannibal mounts him. He doesn't get to see how Hannibal's body reacts to his touch – merely feels it, hears his snarls and purrs, smells how he sharpens with arousal. Hannibal's cock is thick and hard in his hand, wet at the head, and Will settles just past Hannibal's knees and leans down, lapping kitten-like at the head of his mate's cock to clean him, and smiles when Hannibal shivers.

"Knowing you're pregnant with my child is reward all its own," Hannibal says.

Will's smile widens. "So, you don't want my hands?" he asks, rubbing his thumb over the base of Hannibal's cock, where the skin is loose to accommodate a swollen knot. Hannibal sucks in a sharp breath, fingers curling. "My mouth?" He bows down again, sucks a kiss to the head of Hannibal's cock and is pleased when the Alpha snarls in answer. "My slick?"

Hannibal growls, and Will smiles, licking a broad stripe up the underside of Hannibal's cock, and pools his saliva in his mouth, spitting on the head, uses the tight ring of his fingers to spread it down. "Answer me," he says, and lets a little of his Voice come through because he knows how much Hannibal likes to hear it.

On cue, Hannibal's cock twitches in his hand and the Alpha's chest rumbles with a promising growl. Hannibal pushes himself up to his elbows, so he can see Will better, but knows not to reach for Will when Will is having his fun and taking his time. His irises are bleeding into red, they've always had a hint of red in them since Mischa was born, the Alpha instinct in him too fiercely proud of his pack to be stifled.

Will's own eyes burn, and he knows he's showing his gold in answer. Hannibal swallows, licks his lips, and looks at Will like he's ravenous. "I want every part of you," he replies, low. "Always."

Will smiles, and squeezes Hannibal's cock in reward. "Good answer," he replies. He lets go of Hannibal and prowls up his mate, takes him by the shoulders and helps Hannibal sit, settles in his lap so Hannibal's cock ruts between his legs where his clothes are starting to become damp with slick.

Hannibal smiles, and wraps his arms around Will's back. "You have me remarkably well-trained."

Will laughs, and kisses him. Hannibal's warm hands slide down his back, push at his lounge pants until they knot around his knees. Just like the first time Will crawled willingly into Hannibal's lap and took what he wanted, independent of heat. His fingers slide through Will's slick and Will whimpers, resting his forehead on Hannibal's shoulder as the Alpha sinks one finger inside him.

Hannibal growls against his neck, nipping at his pink skin as he sinks his finger in deep, his other hand flattening on Will's hip to hold him steady. Will can smell how much his mate wants him, it hits him just as powerfully as it did the first time, when he was first going into heat and Hannibal offered him a Neutral shot – offered him mercy. He had known then, in the moment when Hannibal held his forehead and touched the needle to his arm, how much self-control his mate had used to stop himself laying rightful claim to Will's body, to wait for his consent as much as they were able at the time.

Will turns his head, seeks his mate's mouth, kisses him fiercely. Hannibal bites his lower lip, forces Will to part his jaws and allow Hannibal to taste him. He whines, hips rolling, his own cock hardening fully at the scent and feel of his mate all around him, drawing him into the spider's web of his love.

"Please," Will gasps, chest burning hot and stomach clenching when Hannibal works another finger into him, getting him ready to take more. Outside of a heat it takes Omegas longer to get slick enough to mount, but Will is ready. He always is – just as Hannibal promised, all it takes is a look or a well-timed growl to spark the desperate need in his stomach. He doubts it will ever fade, no matter how long they're together or how old they get.

Hannibal purrs for him, kisses him again, licks the corner of his mouth. "Do you want me to mount you?" he asks.

Will shakes his head and digs his nails into Hannibal's shoulders. "Just like this," he breathes. "I want you just like this."

Hannibal smiles, eyes flashing with pleasure, and he nudges Will's head up and to the side, bites down gently on his neck where his pulse rushes harsh and heavy, and he pulls his fingers out, settles his hands on Will's hips to help him lift up onto his knees. Will rolls his hips, sighs when Hannibal's cock slides between his legs, and Hannibal lets go with one hand to guide his cockhead against Will's hole. Gravity and habit see them joined, welded together, and Will moans as Hannibal sinks into him, inch by slow inch, until the backs of Will's thighs settle in Hannibal's lap and he's as deep as he can get in this position.

"*Yes*," Will growls, rubbing his sweaty forehead against Hannibal's bared collarbone. He tightens his thighs and hands, ruts his cock against his mate's stomach, and moans when Hannibal's cock slides in and out of him, slow to match Will's pace. It will become frantic before the end, as both of them reach their orgasms, but for now Will wants to take his time, wants to simply enjoy the feeling of his Alpha splitting him open and piercing that one place no one else has gone.

Hannibal's breathing is unsteady, every muscle in him vibrating with the desire to roll Will onto his back and lay proper claim. His nails dig into Will's hips, hands clutching tight as Will moves, rises up onto his knees so that Hannibal almost slides out of him, only to sink back down. Will winces, moaning against his mate's neck, drags his claws heavy-handed down Hannibal's shoulders and holds him back just as tightly. He drives his cock against Hannibal's stomach, wetting his bare skin with slick.

Hannibal growls when Will sinks down sharply, whimpering and tightening up when Hannibal's cockhead finds his prostate. He clenches, rears his head back and gasps when Hannibal licks over his bruised neck, holds him tighter and takes over, planting his feet and strong arms straining to help Will keep moving. Hannibal is still in such prime physical condition, kept that way from hunting and sparring with his children, and Will can admit he has a weak spot for being manhandled, especially since he's no dainty Omega himself.

He trembles, curls up in his mate's arms and rests his cheek on the top of Hannibal's head, kisses his sweaty hair and clutches at him as Hannibal moves him, growling low and chasing the tight clench of Will's body. With every thrust, the heat in Will's chest expands, pulses, promising and getting lower and lower in his stomach. He aches, slick and wanting.

Hannibal growls, suddenly, when Will curls his nails into the nape of his Alpha's neck, lowers his mouth to Hannibal's ear and bites the arch of it lightly. "Hannibal," he breathes, knowing how much his mate likes hearing Will growl his name. "Please."

He feels the tension in Hannibal more acutely like this, feels the tremble in his spine, the strength in his shoulders, the way his hands clench up tight enough *almost* to hurt. Hannibal bares his teeth against Will's neck, parts his jaws and sinks into Will's tender flesh as he pulls Will down harshly, jerks his hips, and Will gasps as Hannibal's knot grows, locking them together. He moans, reaching between their slick stomachs to fist his cock. He rolls his hips, chasing the tight pull of Hannibal's knot and the pressure against his prostate, warm to the bone as he feels Hannibal fill him.

Hannibal snarls, and rolls them, planting Will on his back on the bed, and rears up, shoving his knot in as tightly as it can go. His eyes are wild, teeth and irises red, and Will whimpers, leans up to lick his own blood from his mate's mouth. His orgasm catches him when Hannibal purrs, kissing Will deeply as Will shivers and spills over his own hand and stomach. Hannibal's sharp, cinnamon scent is fading, and Will breathes in greedily, gasping for it, gagging for it.

Hannibal pulls back, and smiles down at him, resting their foreheads together as Will recovers. He wipes his hand on Hannibal's shirt idly, grinning when the Alpha huffs and rolls his eyes, shrugging the garment off and tossing it to one side. They roll again, until Will can perch on Hannibal's lap while they wait out his knot. Will sighs, stretching his arms above his head, and hums in satisfaction.

He looks down at Hannibal, finds him smiling and purring, and grins back, settling a hand over his stomach. "You know, I thought I'd passed the point of being able to breed for you," he says, idly rubbing his slick hand over his skin.

Hannibal's eyes drop, sharpen, and his smile widens and turns soft, adoring. He rests one hand over Will's, curling his fingers between Will's gently. "There are some schools of thought that believe an Omega's fertility is directly linked to the presence of children," he says. Will blinks at him, frowning. "I mean, you are only wet again because your children are growing, and becoming independent."

"Empty nest syndrome?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods. "Something like that."

Will laughs, rolling his eyes. "Who came up with that theory?"

Hannibal smiles back at him, teasing. "I believe it was your Doctor Greystone."

Will huffs, and smacks Hannibal's hand away with another playful shake of his head. "That woman," he says, and sighs. "I remember hearing she's lecturing at York University sometime next week. We should go."

"Oh?" Hannibal asks, raising an eyebrow.

"I think it'd be fun," Will replies. "Certainly more diverting than watching politics. And we won't have to take blood pressure medication for it."

"I'm surprised, Will. I was under the impression you placed some stock in her theories."

Will hums, and leans down for a kiss. "Only when it suits me," he replies, smiling. Hannibal returns it, and Will shifts his weight, wincing when Hannibal's knot deflates and allows them to separate. He pulls his lounge pants up around his hips and climbs off his mate, allowing him to fix his clothes – though they are a lost cause for polite company, given the huge stain of slick Will left behind on them.

Hannibal rolls onto his side, mirroring Will, and pets a hand through his sweaty hair, pushing it back from his face. His eyes search Will's, and Will allows it, although after a while he starts to feel the overwhelming urge to drop his gaze. Even mated to Hannibal, and after so long being a predator in his own right, it's natural to defer to his mate and drop eye contact when it stretches out too long. An Omega instinct he will likely never overcome.

Then, he sighs. "So, we'll start with the car tonight?" he asks, recalling their topic of conversation before soft words and promising touches had overwhelmed them and driven them to their bed. The day is still relatively young, and most of their family are night owls, preferring to move and operate in the darkness.

Hannibal nods.

Will bites his lower lip. He doesn't want to admit it, and yet; "I think you might be right," he whispers, putting a hand on his stomach again. Hannibal's eyes drop to the action. "I feel… worried. A concern I did not feel for our daughters."

"Adam is our youngest, and he is also an Alpha," Hannibal replies, gentle with understanding. "It *is* different."

"I fear he's too reckless, still. Too rash. And yet to hold him back for the sake of my own fear is…*weak*."

"Not weak," Hannibal replies firmly. He tucks his fingers under Will's chin, forces their eyes to meet. "Darling, you're not weak for wanting to protect your children."

"That's not what I mean," Will says, fingers curling around Hannibal's wrist. He ducks his head and kisses Hannibal's palm. "I would do anything to protect them. Anything at all – and you, if I had to." Hannibal nods, eyes falling to the old knot of scar tissue on Will's shoulder. He knows first-hand just how far Will can and has gone for the sake of his family. "But that leaves me vulnerable to exploitation. I…" He pauses, swallowing harshly, and shakes his head.

Hannibal tilts his head, then sighs, and gathers Will close to his chest. Will tucks his nose against Hannibal's neck, breathing in his scent deeply as Hannibal's arms settle around his shoulders. "I think the difference here, darling, is that you see yourself as emotional because you are feeling those emotions." Will blinks, frowning. "And you know I see them, because you let me see them. But I do not think for a single second that, if something were to happen to our children, you would do the wrong thing."

"What even counts as the wrong thing?" Will asks, rolling his eyes. "I'd burn the whole country down if something happened to them."

"I know," Hannibal says, and Will can hear him smiling. "As would I. Do you think my decision to do so is emotional?"

"It's instinctive," Will replies. "Your right as an Alpha to destroy those that harm your pack."

"And where do my rights end, and yours begin?" Hannibal asks. He pulls back so Will can see his face, cups Will's cheek and leans in, kisses him chastely, their noses brushing, before he parts from Will, so their eyes can meet. "Do you not think it understandable, expected even, to react the same way?"

"It's not the same, though," Will protests. He sighs, and shakes his head. "I don't know how to articulate what I'm feeling, so I don't expect you to understand either."

Hannibal huffs, corners of his mouth twitching in a smile. "I know it's been a long time, but it was my job to understand, *especially* when my patients could not articulate."

Will rolls his eyes. "Have I not diverted you enough, and kept you entertained?"

"Immeasurably," Hannibal replies, and steals one more kiss, before he sits up. Will makes a half-hearted sound of protest, reaching out to try and coax Hannibal's warmth back to him, but Hannibal merely smiles and hauls Will upright, then out of bed and towards the bathroom.

After they shower, Will goes to Adam's room. He knocks on the door and waits for the absent 'Come in' to enter, smiling when he sees Adam perched on his bed, his laptop at his side playing what sounds like ambient piano music. He has a book in his hand, and Will cannot see the cover, but he knows Adam is going through a Shakespeare phase.

He lets the door swing almost all the way shut behind him and comes to a halt at the end of Adam's bed. As the youngest, he has the smallest room, since they keep Mischa's open for when she visits. His bed is pressed flat to the wall behind the door, so he sees it moving before whoever comes in sees him. He has a large window on the opposite wall, facing the back garden. The walls are white, the carpet a dark blue, and there is a large bookshelf on one side of the window heavily laden with notebooks and textbooks for school, as well as whatever small library he has started to gather for himself. Adam writes things down a lot. He doesn't have any posters or art up like his sisters do, but Will knows he has several sketchbooks full of doodles and drawings. He has spent many an evening with his father, practicing shading and perspective.

Adam looks up, tucks his bookmark between the pages of his book and sets it down, and mutes his laptop. "Hey, mom," he says, and sits upright. "What's up?"

Will smiles, and holds out his hand. "Have you eaten?" he asks. Adam nods, and takes Will's hand, letting Will pull him to his feet. Will leads him out of his room, shutting off the light and closing the door.

"We're going to start your training tonight," Will says.

He hears Adam's quick, excited intake of breath, and smiles to himself. He leads his son out towards the garage, which Hannibal had extended when they first moved in. It's large enough to fit three cars and still have space for Will's desk where he makes his lures and repairs fishing equipment. Inside the garage sit three cars – the first is Hannibal's, a Bentley much like the one he drove in America, though a newer model with all the bells and whistles attached. Then, Will's Volvo, a four-door, plain grey affair at his insistence. He's sure Hannibal would have much rather bought him a more expensive and flashier vehicle, but Will refused. The third is an old Victoria, sitting half-concealed under a dust-covered sheet in the far corner of the garage.

Shannon's car is parked in the driveway, out of sight as the door is closed.

Hannibal is inside, waiting for them, and he turns and smiles in fond greeting as Will leads Adam inside and closes the garage door behind them. Adam's fingers flex between Will's, and he smells nervous as Will leads him over to the Victoria. Hannibal takes the car keys from a little hook by Will's desk, and unlocks the trunk, opening it.

He nods to the empty space, which is large enough for a grown man to curl up relatively comfortably but not much else. Will looks to Adam, who frowns between his parents, brow furrowing.

"What's going on?" he asks.

Will smiles, and wraps his arm around Adam's shoulders, hugging him gently. He noses at Adam's temple, breathing in his scent deeply, pine cones and mint like Will. "If someone were to attack you, but killing you wasn't their goal, what would be the most likely course of action?"

Adam swallows, nuzzling Will's jaw. "Kidnapping," he says. "A vehicle, to move me to a secondary location."

Will nods, and steps back, gesturing to the open trunk. "Get in."

Adam swallows again, his fingers curling. A soft whine spills from him, edged with anxiety, and Will's throat gets tight, instinctively wanting to soothe and protect his son and calm his distress. Hannibal reaches for Adam and he goes, allowing his father to rest his hands on Adam's shoulders and lead him to the trunk.

"Did Mischa and Shannon have to do this?"

Hannibal nods. Will brings his hands up to his stomach, fidgeting anxiously as Hannibal walks Adam to the back of the car. He doesn't want to watch, he feels sick with nerves and he's not sure he can honestly stay and watch, but he has to. He has to try.

"We will be here the whole time," Hannibal says, and whether it's to reassure Adam or Will more, Will cannot possibly say. Adam nods, and looks over his shoulder at Will. Their eyes

meet, and Will is fiercely proud of the determined set of Adam's jaw, the mask of calm that has taken over his face. He looks much more settled than Will feels.

Hannibal lets Adam go, and Adam climbs into the car, curling up on his side. Will can see him looking up at his father as Hannibal rests a hand on the top of the trunk, ready to close it.

"We will give you three hours," Hannibal says. "At the end of that time, if you haven't managed to escape, we will let you out and try again tomorrow."

Adam swallows, whining softly. "Will it take three hours?" he whispers, wide-eyed.

Hannibal smiles, and leans down, petting through Adam's hair and kissing his forehead. "Mischa's record is seventeen minutes for this model," he says. Adam's eyes widen. "Shannon's is fourteen. But this is a learning curve, and as I said, your mother and I will be here the whole time."

Adam nods after a moment, closing his eyes and nuzzling Hannibal's arm. "Wish me luck," he says with a wry, forced smile. Will goes to his fishing desk by the car and sits, unable to force his legs to hold his weight up, as he watches Adam duck his head, and then Hannibal closes the trunk door with a loud slam.

Will whines immediately once he's robbed of the sight of his child. He clutches his stomach and leans forward, shaking with the need to go to Adam and free him immediately.

Then, Hannibal's hand is in his hair, stroking it back from his face, and settles lightly on the nape of his neck in a placative touch. Will swallows, hard enough that his throat clicks, and Hannibal leans against the edge of his desk. Will turns his head, tucking his shoulder and cheek against his Alpha's thigh, and closes his eyes. He can hear small, brushing noises of Adam moving around, but not much else.

"He'll be alright," Hannibal says softly, still petting through Will's hair.

Will whines, unable to stop himself. "I know."

Hannibal sighs, scratching his nails across Will's scalp. He smells calm, completely in control as he always has been when they train their children, but Will can't help acknowledging that he was right – he's emotional, prone to overreaction when he's pregnant, and too sensitive to the idea of losing a child. He wants to leave, and would if he didn't think that being *away* from Adam and unable to hear or help him would make him even sicker with anxiety.

"Is it bad that I can't help thinking, even as we train him how to be a better prisoner, we are going to teach him how to be a better hunter as well?"

Hannibal huffs, and when Will raises his eyes, he sees his mate smiling. "A double-edged sword for all our children," he replies. "So why does Adam's evolution trouble you more than our daughters'?"

Will frowns. "You know why."

Hannibal smiles. "Because he is too much like me, or too much like you?"

Will shakes his head, moves his eyes to the car. The vehicle rocks, ever-so-slightly, and creaks as Adam's weight inside of it moves. The Victoria is too old to have the inner release that was mandated in all car models after 2002, so Adam will have to figure out another way to escape. Mischa's first run took her a little over an hour, and Shannon's closer to two. Younger siblings tend to overachieve, to be more competitive, and Will is sure by the end that Adam will be no different.

Statistics. Demographics. Will's stomach turns.

"He told me he wants to be the best Alpha he can be," Will replies. "He hasn't even presented, and he's thinking like that. I worry about what that might mean."

"How so?"

"There's more than one way to be the best at something," Will says. "The ultimate predator. The ultimate provider. The king and the renegade. I don't know which one he means, or if he even knows. If he has us as his role models, then…"

If Hannibal is offended by that statement, he doesn't show it. His hand doesn't slow in Will's hair, merely keeps petting him, keeping him as calm as he is able while they wait for their son to escape.

But Will knows he's trying to think of what to say, in the correct way. He growls. "Don't speak to me delicately," he says, turning to meet his mate's eyes. "Speak honestly."

Hannibal presses his lips together, and sighs through his nose. "Do you think we are evil men, Will?"

Will huffs. "There is no good or evil," he replies, "just behavior."

"Ah, so we are monsters," Hannibal says, smiling.

"Yes," Will says, nodding. "Monsters are not monsters to their own kind."

"I see," Hannibal murmurs, deep in thought. "And you worry that Adam will not find a monster of his own. That he will become the wrong kind of Alpha – not because his nature is inherently warped, but because everyone else's simply doesn't exist like yours and mine does."

"I suppose."

Hannibal nods, and then he pulls Will to his feet. Will whines in protest, but settles quickly when Hannibal turns him and puts him on his desk. The wood creaks at his weight, and he spreads his legs to allow his mate close to him, allows Hannibal to cup his face and force their eyes to meet.

"A very long time ago, you asked me a question," Hannibal says. Will frowns, licking his lips. "You asked me why I had never mated, and I told you that, at the time, I had yet to find an Omega that would suit my needs."

Will nods, and huffs a laugh. "You said that after you found me, though," he replies. "You lied."

"I told a half-truth, for your sake, yes," Hannibal says. "But that is because your evolution came to you late in life. Our children were given the head start that was denied us." He pauses, making sure Will is listening. "I realized that you were my mate when I saw you go into rut. I saw in you, a monster like me, and I knew then that you could be mine, and I could be yours."

Will smiles despite himself.

"I truly believe that all of our children are capable of finding mates that suit their needs. It is our job, as parents, to send them into the world as people who know what those needs are. Whatever they might be."

Will sighs, nodding, and touches his forehead to Hannibal's. "I'm still allowed to worry," he murmurs, a half-hearted protest.

"Of course, darling," Hannibal replies, kissing the words gently to Will's mouth. "It's your right as a mother to worry for your children. Another reason I warned you to be gentle with Mischa's boyfriend, when she brings him."

Will hums, his mouth turning sour at the reminder. "She is definitely your daughter," he murmurs. "If this boy hurts her, I know we would not be first in line to dispose of him."

Hannibal laughs. "You're right," he replies fondly.

Will smiles. "I usually am."

The three hour mark comes, and Adam is still inside the car. Will frowns, and lets out a soft sound of worry. Hannibal stands and unlocks the trunk door, opening it. Will stands when Adam doesn't immediately sit up.

He's lying inside the trunk, still, his eyes closed and his hair dark with sweat. Will's eyes widen, but before he can let out a cry of alarm, Adam suddenly surges up and tackles Hannibal, sending them both crashing to the floor. He's snarling, no red or gold in his eyes since he hasn't presented yet, and swings for Hannibal's face.

Hannibal catches his fist, growls, and rolls them quickly, pinning Adam on his hands and knees and jerking his arm back to threaten dislocating it. Adam snaps at him, huffing, his cheeks flushed from the heat of the car.

"What the Hell was that?" Will demands.

Adam lifts his head, growls at him, upper lip curling. "I couldn't figure out how to do it," he says. "So I waited."

"What, you thought your best plan was to attack the full-grown Alpha after sitting in a trunk for three hours?" Will snaps, sharp with disapproval.

"I was saving my strength," Adam replies, somewhat petulantly.

Hannibal hums. He leans down and nuzzles Adam's sweaty hair, and releases his arm. "And how did that work out for you?" he asks, and stands, holding his hand out to Adam. Adam huffs, and rises of his own accord, dusting himself off.

"I thought I was being smart," Adam says. "If I couldn't get out, the best option would be to wait until we were in a secondary location."

"Except," Hannibal counters, "you had the assurance of knowing when you would be released – or that you would be released at all – and you knew your mother and I wouldn't expect you to leap up and attack us when we opened the car. Someone who wanted to do you harm may keep you in a car for far longer, and in worse climate, and would definitely anticipate you fighting back."

Adam glares at him. "So I should do nothing?" he demands. "Remain passive and let them do whatever they wanted to me? To other hostages?"

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and tilts his head to one side. "Do not mistake practicality for heartlessness. You are allowed to be afraid. You are allowed to be angry. You are not allowed to be foolish."

Adam's eyes flash, but he presses his lips together, swallowing back his retort. Will whines, gently, calling Adam's and Hannibal's attention to him. When their eyes meet, the last of the tension in Adam's shoulders abruptly fades away, and he goes to Will, wrapping his arms around Will gently and nosing at his neck, purring softly to soothe his mother.

Will hugs him back, rests his cheek against Adam's hair and squeezes his shoulders gently. "We'll try again tomorrow," he whispers, and Adam nods. He looks to his father again, and sighs, and ducks his head, releasing Will and hugging Hannibal just as tightly. Hannibal's purr melds with his son's, lower and stronger, but gentle all the same. He cups Adam's cheeks and kisses his forehead, and Adam smiles.

"See you tomorrow," he says, and nods to Will again when Hannibal releases him. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Adam," Will replies. Adam leaves the garage through the door that leads into the kitchen, and Will sighs heavily, folding his arms across his chest.

Hannibal gravitates to his side and Will lifts his head to meet his eyes. "He's too confident," he murmurs.

"Confidence isn't a bad thing," Hannibal replies mildly. "Ego is."

"So he's too *proud*, is that what you're saying?" Will asks, raising an eyebrow and huffing the word.

Hannibal lifts one shoulder in a shrug. "He's genetically bred to be proud," he replies. "However, the center of the issue is that he trusts us too much. He knows we will always be there to protect him." Will frowns. "If his training is to be effective, he must first be afraid."

"I don't want my child to be afraid of me," Will snarls, harshly. Firmly.

"Nor do I," Hannibal replies, and Will can tell he means it. His gaze is sincere when he sets his eyes on Will. "And I do not want to trick him, or outsource his training to someone else. Resentment can manifest itself in many ways and I would think it the ultimate failure on my part as a father if my children ever blamed me for their suffering. Or their mother."

Will regards his mate for a long time, before he presses his lips together and straightens. "Fear is a powerful motivator," he begins, and Hannibal nods. "But pride can be…similarly manipulated."

Hannibal's mouth twitches at the corners, a pleased smile fought back. Will answers it. "I know that look," Hannibal purrs, approaching Will and cupping his nape with one large, warm hand. Will shivers, arching against his mate's chest as Hannibal leans down, kisses him chastely. "What are you thinking, my love?"

Will hums, kisses Hannibal again, and takes his hands. "That I'm tired," he replies. Hannibal smiles, and allows Will to drag him out of the garage and into their home. "And I think this conversation can wait until the morning."

Hannibal nods, accepting that, and follows Will to their bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

"Look Mother" kind of ruined me for "My love" for a while but you know what HANNIBAL WOULD CALL WILL THAT OKAY. I'm making it so - all the pet names.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

show up two months late with Starbucks
ALSO, so in First, I know I had Will refer to his Omega mother as his dad. That was before I honed my pronoun process - Omegas are referred to as the mothers of their children, even when mated to women, if they are the ones that gave birth. So Will's 'mom' is his dad, since in canon he raised Will but in 'First' Will had a female parent that married his mother after his Alpha sire left.
I think that might have confused people more, but oh well!
Enjoy! Sorry it took so long :D

Although he can tell Hannibal is brimming with curiosity, Will doesn't immediately divulge his plan. He must think it through carefully, beforehand – his mate would expect no less. Both of them are internal thinkers, mulling over every possible outcome, effect, and circumstance that would run the risk of interfering with their designs before giving them voice.

So he lies awake in their bed, Hannibal's body heat a scant inch from him since the air is warm and most English homesteads do not have air conditioning. Because the air is so humid, opening windows only brings bugs and the hope of a cross breeze, yet the window is open in their bedroom and a fan sits in the corner, and makes a steady attempt at keeping them cool. Hannibal is on his back, dozing lazily. Will watches the flutter of his lashes as he ebbs between wakefulness and slumber. He knows from experience that his mate is a quick riser, and once Will lets him know he's ready to get up, he will do so without complaint, but the heat is making them lazy and Will has nowhere to be. They're both at the age where they have retired comfortably – Will and Hannibal made a sizeable nest egg on top of Hannibal's wealth during their years in Italy, and have no need for further income unless boredom drives them to it.

Will sighs, closes his eyes, and rolls onto his other side, a smile crossing his face when Hannibal's hand reaches out absently to settle over his hip in a light touch, on the other side of the cool sheets. He nuzzles his pillow and sighs again.

"If you're trying to get my attention, you have it."

Will's smile widens. "Just thinking."

"About Adam?"

"Among other things."

Hannibal hums, his fingers tightening gently on Will's hip. "Well, whenever you're ready," he says quietly, and Will nods to himself, idly toying with a rumple in the sheets as he settles back into a light doze.

When Shannon and Mischa had been undergoing their training, Will hadn't needed to worry about things like Alpha Voices and instincts overriding their instruction. Though they can feel when Hannibal purrs, and they settle under Will's hands because he's their mother and they love him, they do not run the risk of reacting strongly when an Alpha snarls at them, or an Omega whines. Adam, however, does, and he will if Will and Hannibal don't train him to overcome it.

But it is not something Will himself has ever had to worry about. Nor, he thinks, has Hannibal. Hannibal has always been a prime Alpha, the top of his species, and the only Omega he has allowed to influence him is Will – and, conversely, Will has never had an Alpha try to force him to do anything, has never really felt the influence of a Voice except by Jack or Hannibal, and that was so long ago.

He sighs again, too warm to remain in bed, and sits upright. Hannibal's hand falls from his hip and the Alpha stirs, rolling onto his side and blinking open dark eyes when Will turns to look at him. His expression is soft, fond with affection, and Will can't resist leaning over and kissing him, nuzzling the wayward strands of hair from his forehead.

Hannibal purrs, lifting his head to steal another kiss, and touches Will's bitten neck with gentle fingers. "Are you hungry?" he asks.

Will shakes his head, and smiles. "We can't stay in bed all day," he replies.

Hannibal huffs. "Debatable."

Will laughs, and wraps his fingers between his mate's, tugging gently. "I'm going to see if Adam's awake."

Hannibal huffs again, but nods, rolling out of bed when Will stands and goes to their dresser. He sheds his sleep clothes and pulls on a t-shirt and new lounge pants, wincing at the dry, tacky cling of old slick and Hannibal's seed stuck to his thighs.

Hannibal's arms wrap around him from behind and Will shivers, baring his neck even as he lets out a halfhearted sound of protest. "Don't," he groans. "I stink, and it's hot."

"You smell wonderful," Hannibal murmurs. "You smell like me." His hand flattens over Will's stomach and his purr is loud.

Will smiles. "I need a shower," he replies. "Adam's going to be able to smell this shit, soon."

Hannibal makes another quiet, pleased sound, his nose pressed to Will's neck. His tone, when he speaks again, is considering; "Perhaps you're right," he says, and Will rolls his eyes. "Although it gives me no end of pleasure, you are certainly in no state for polite company."

Will rolls his eyes again, shoving his mate's hands away with a playful smile. "Thanks," he says dryly. Hannibal merely grins at him. "Alright, I'll shower. You rally the troops and feed everyone, and make sure Adam's ready for round two."

"Of course," Hannibal replies. He catches Will as Will moves to the bathroom, curls his hands around Will's shoulders and spins him, pressing him up against the wall by the bathroom entrance. Will shivers, gasping in surprise, and Hannibal leans in to steal another kiss – deep, passionate, in a way that makes Will's stomach tense up and his thighs shake.

He wraps his hands around Hannibal's shoulders, sighing when Hannibal's hands flatten on his waist and shove him against the wall. The cinnamon scent of his mate's arousal is thick on his tongue, sharpened by the heat between their bodies. Hannibal growls against his mouth, fingers curling tight in Will's flanks, and Will trembles, his spine turning hot and his thighs spreading to make room for his mate.

"Hannibal," he breathes, moans his mate's name when Hannibal pulls back, red-threaded eyes meeting Will's golden ones. Hannibal breathes out heavily, growling low, and kisses the corner of Will's mouth, his jaw, licks over his tender, pink neck.

"Forgive me," Hannibal whispers, his hands sliding down over Will's shirt to rest tightly on his hips. "I find myself strangely loathe to be parted from you, even for such a short amount of time."

Will smiles, his shaking hands curling around Hannibal's shoulders when the Alpha leans in to kiss him again. He sighs, tempted beyond measure to delay their day's activities. His body knows the touch of its mate intimately, wants to be wet and open for him, wants to bare itself for Hannibal's teeth and his hands, his love.

"Your children are hungry, Doctor Lecter," he whispers, and Hannibal pulls back, eyes dark as they rake over Will's face. Will smiles, licks his lips, and brushes their noses together, cupping Hannibal's cheek with a gentle hand. "Perhaps it's not just Adam's instincts, and mine, that we should be worried about."

Hannibal's eyes flash, recognizing and accepting the challenge Will has placed before him. "Are you suggesting I cannot control myself?"

"Am I?" Will replies, teasing.

Hannibal smiles, and sighs. It feels like he lets Will go with a supreme amount of effort. "You are still such a devious thing," he says, warm with affection. Will smiles, flushing at the praise, and accepts one more kiss when Hannibal leans in to give it to him. "Very well. I will see to preparations."

"Good," Will murmurs, and carefully slides around the frame of the door, closing it behind him and sealing himself inside. He sheds his clothes and goes into the shower, and cleans himself off briskly, knowing that the steam in the bathroom will just cause him to sweat again if he takes too long.

When he emerges and dresses again, he finds Adam and Shannon in the dining room, tucking into a hearty serving each of gammon, eggs, and pineapple rings. Will smiles, pleased that Hannibal is doing his due diligence and feeding his children high-protein meals. When he sits, Hannibal emerges from the kitchen and sets his and Will's plate down, along with a cup of iced sweet tea for Will, and coffee for himself.

Will huffs, swallowing back his annoyance, knowing he won't be able to indulge his caffeine addiction while he's pregnant. He cuts off the first bite of gammon, slides a small heap of scrambled eggs on top and eats it, humming in pleasure at the salty flavor.

After a while of companionable silence, Shannon clears her throat and sets her knife and fork down. "Mom, Dad, I was thinking of going to the Stray fair today. It's the last week it's in town and a bunch of my friends are going."

Will nods, ignoring the clench of anxiety in his stomach he always gets when he thinks of his children being in such a high-risk, public place. Harrogate is by far one of the safest large towns in the North of England, certainly safer than their neighboring cities of Leeds and York, but he still worries. "Just make sure your phone is charged and you have money for a cab if something happens to your car," he says.

Shannon nods, and smiles.

"Who will you be going with?" Hannibal asks mildly, taking a sip of coffee.

"Mark, Emily, and Cameron for sure," Shannon replies. "Jamie might join us if her parents let her."

Will nods. He has met Shannon's friends before, the few afternoons they've been over to sit in the garden and talk about whatever it is teenagers talk about nowadays. Mark and Cameron are both Omegas, and polite boys, naturally deferential to Hannibal and respectful of Will. Emily is older than Shannon by a year, closer to Mischa's age, but started school late so they're in the same classes in school, and Jamie is Emily's younger sister.

"When will you be going?" Will asks.

"Emily's meant to text me when she leaves. Probably around noon."

He nods, eyeing the clock on the mantlepiece behind Adam. It's just past ten in the morning, according to the clock, and he turns his attention back to his meal, eating heartily. Though he wasn't hungry before, he's practically starving now.

Hannibal watches him eat, purring softly. "We'll be with Adam in the garage for most of the afternoon," he says lightly after another span of silence. "If you need anything, we will have our phones."

Adam's eyes snap up, dark and eager. "We gonna do the cars again?" he asks. Will nods, pleased that despite what could only be described as a failure the night before, he is still eager to keep trying. He inherited Will and Hannibal's determination, at least.

"Ugh, the cars," Shannon says, shoving an entire pineapple ring into her mouth. "I remember that. I hold the record," she adds proudly, winking in her brother's direction.

Adam returns her grin with one of his own, off-kilter and showing his teeth. "For now," he replies.

Will huffs a laugh, hiding his smile into his glass. He meets Hannibal's gaze, sees the fierce glow of pride within them, and nods.

They finish breakfast and Will and Adam go to the garage while Hannibal and Shannon clear the plates. Once they're done, they both join Will and Adam in the garage and Shannon comes forward for a hug, breathing in Will's scent deeply, and waves at her brother and father, her keys in her hand.

"I'll let you know when I'm there and when I'm headed back," she says.

"Be safe, mylimoji," Hannibal murmurs – 'Sweetheart'. All of their children are fluent in Italian and English, with some understanding of Lithuanian, just as Will learned after mating with Hannibal, though he doubts any of them would be able to hold any in-depth conversation in that third language.

Shannon smiles at him, then opens the garage door to reveal her car, closing it behind her as she gets inside. Will listens to the engine start, the gear shift creak into reverse, and then it pulls away.

He turns his attention to Hannibal, as Hannibal takes Adam's hand and leads him towards the Victoria. "Because it's so warm, you will not spend more than an hour in here, this time," he says, and Adam nods, his eyes on the trunk as Hannibal opens it to reveal the dark innards. "And I hope you will put more thought into your escape plan than last night."

Adam's eyes flash, his narrow chin lifted in challenge, and Will hides his smile behind his hand.

"Good luck," he tells Adam, and receives a nod in answer before Adam climbs into the car. Hannibal closes the trunk, and they both settle at Will's fishing desk, Will on the seat and Hannibal leaning against the edge. One of Hannibal's hands settles on the back of Will's neck, gently squeezing, and Will sighs, wrapping his arm behind Hannibal's thigh. He can hear Adam moving around inside the car, the creak of the suspension as his weight shifts, but not much else.

"Have you given any more thought to the next stage in Adam's training?" Hannibal murmurs as the silence stretches on.

Will hums. "Some," he replies. He sighs. "The issue I keep running into is that I want his emotions, his reactions, to be genuine, but I don't want to really scare him, or scar him."

Hannibal nods absently. "We could take him out to the Abbey, as we did with Mischa and Shannon," he suggests.

Will considers it. When the girls were sixteen, Hannibal and Will had driven them out to Fountains Abbey, which is a beautiful ruin of an Abbey torn down during the reign of Henry the Eighth. They'd been given instructions to try and find their way home, and although the drive itself was less than half an hour, it had taken them almost thirteen hours to make it back. Will had been sick with worry the entire time, as they hadn't been allowed access to their cell phones, nor given a map. But they'd managed.

"I don't…know if I could survive that a second time," he says quietly. Even though the Abbey is near a town, and there are signposts that would lead Adam home, a lonely pre-presenting Alpha would garner much more attention than two of-age girls. At least, he thinks so. People are more suspicious of lone boys, and without any companionship, Adam would have no one to look out for him, or fight with him should it come to that.

Hannibal's fingers tighten on the back of his neck and when Will looks up, the Alpha's expression is soft with understanding. While the girls were gone, Adam hadn't moved from his mother's side, trying with all his might to calm and soothe Will by nuzzling and petting him through his distress.

Will sighs, a strange knot of guilt forming when he looks back at Adam. "We should have given him a brother," he says. "Someone closer to his age. He's alone in this, just as our next child will be."

"He's not alone," Hannibal argues softly. His thumb brushes up the side of Will's neck, over the old mating scar, and behind his ear. "He has his sisters, and he has you, and he has me." He sighs when Will doesn't answer, his eyes fixed on the car.

He straightens, and Will's hand falls away when he kneels, flattening both hands over Will's stomach. He meets Will's eyes, so full of adoration that Will's breath catches, and rests his cheek on Will's thigh.

"Maybe," Will begins, and swallows, petting his hand gently through Hannibal's hair. It's damp with sweat, reacting to the heat and humidity in the garage. "Maybe we should have him spar with Shannon for a while. And Mischa. They won't be able to react to him, and he would be more in-control than if he were fighting you, or me."

Hannibal blinks, and then smiles. "I think that's a wonderful idea," he says.

Will smiles back, and his gaze snaps up when he hears a loud noise. Hannibal stands, and they both go to the car in time to see Adam's body wriggling into the back seat from the trunk, the middle and left seat back pressed flat. He's breathing hard and sweating, and Will opens the door for him to clamber out.

Adam is on his knees for a moment, wiping his hair back from his face, and then he stands, his face flushed and smile wide and proud.

Hannibal makes a pleased noise, checking his watch. "Eleven minutes," he says. "Well done."

"Thanks," Adam breathes, wiping his face again. "I was up late last night researching how to break out of the trunks of cars."

Will grins, purring low when Adam goes to him and wraps him up in a hug. "Good boy," he says quietly, nuzzling his son's sweaty hair.

"Yes," Hannibal adds. "Provided your attackers are not in the car with you, do not have ranged weapons, and there are not more than two of them, and the car is not in motion – a fine solution."

Adam frowns, sending a glare his father's way. "It worked, didn't it?" he demands.

Hannibal regards him, his smile faint and fond. "It was not a criticism, Adam," he says lightly. Adam blinks, his expression clearing. "These are simply things you need to think about. Noticing the amount of assailants is paramount when it comes to an escape or fight plan. One should never go into a fight overwhelmed and outnumbered, if one can help it."

Adam nods, and Will takes his hand and leads him to the fishing desk. He directs Adam to sit and crouches down in front of him, arms folded over his thighs.

"Tell me what it was like, in there," he says.

Adam blinks at him, licking his lips. His cheeks are very red, his neck slick from sweat. "Hot," he replies dryly, and Will laughs.

"Yes," he says with a conceding nod. "What else? What did you hear? And smell?"

"I was…very aware that there wasn't a lot of air in the trunk," Adam replies slowly. His eyes flash over Will's shoulder, where Hannibal is standing, and he looks back to Will. "I wanted to keep my breathing shallow, in case I ran out."

"Without specific measures being taken, you will not suffocate in the trunk of a car," Hannibal says. "Not unless you panic."

Adam nods, accepting that. His hands press flat to his thighs and he breathes out. "Right."

"What else?" Will presses.

Adam huffs, sounding frustrated. "I don't know! It was dark, it was hot, what else was there to notice?"

Will sighs. "Observation is not just about what you see," he says, pushing himself to his feet. "No matter the situation, all five senses must be utilized as much as possible. Could you smell yourself in the car, from the day before? Could you smell your sisters, from their time in there? Could you smell me and your father? What if kidnappers had been speaking – would you have been able to hear them? Use what they're saying to your advantage?"

Adam swallows, and looks away.

"I know it's a lot," Will says gently, stepping forward and cupping Adam's face, bringing their gazes back to locking. "It's a lot to learn, and it feels like we're piling all of this on you very quickly, but the more you learn now, the better an Alpha you'll be when and if this situation presents itself."

Adam blinks at him, and frowns. "…Will it?" he asks, and Will blinks, letting him go and stepping away. Adam leans forward, his eyes wide and his voice young, unsure. "You and dad are always so obsessed that we know how to protect ourselves, that there's some… looming danger, just around the corner. Why?"

Will swallows, and looks to his mate. Even though their children know about their parents' appetites, and hungers, they have never told them the story of why they came to Italy in the first place. Most of their past, before Mischa's birth, is a question mark to Mischa, Shannon, and Adam.

Hannibal sighs, and holds out his hand. "Come take a walk with me," he says, and Adam nods, standing and lacing their fingers together. Will whines, unable to help himself, and Hannibal smiles at him. "Will you be alright on your own?"

"Just stay close," Will replies.

Hannibal nods. "Of course, mano meile," he says, and draws Will in to kiss his forehead. Will smiles at the pet name – 'My love' – and allows Adam to nuzzle his shoulder before both Alphas draw away. Will goes through the door into the kitchen as the garage door opens, letting them out into the driveway. He feels strangely agitated, off-kilter when at least one of his children is not in his immediate line of sight, and wonders absently if this is another type of codependence, felt solely by mothers and their children.

He goes to the living room, where the window opens to the back garden, and settles into place on the comfortable couch. This room is sparsely furnished, only a couch and chairs making up a sitting area where, when Mischa would be back on school holidays, they would all sit around the room and tell stories, or play games of logic and quick thinking.

He sighs, closing his eyes. They really have raised their children in such an odd way, conditioning them to be top predators regardless of their breed. He is sure none of them resent their upbringing – they do, after all, have little to compare it to – and yet he knows it is so different than that of others. Even his own was so…innocent. That's the word he would have to use for it.

Hannibal had no choice. He was born a monster and never had the opportunity nor the inclination to change his nature. Even Will, as naïve and innocent as he once was, dove deep into the looking glass and never looked back when the opportunity presented itself. But their children, they could have been something entirely different.

It brings up an interesting question, whether that killer instinct is hereditary, and Will laughs at the idea of his daughters and son being bored by the sheep of the world. Perhaps Doctor Greystone has a theory about it.

He dozes off, and is roused by a warm body settling in place behind his legs on the couch. He tenses, and takes a deep breath, before he settles, recognizing Adam's pine cone scent. He

opens his eyes and looks over his shoulders, find Adam staring at the hearth, his gaze dark and his jaw clenching, fingers drumming nervously on his thighs.

Will lets out a quiet sound, reaching out to touch his son's arm. Adam startles, and flinches, meeting Will's eyes.

"My father is a murderer," he says.

Will blinks at him, and frowns, before he rolls onto his back and sits upright, his legs still stuck behind Adam's back. "Baby, you know where our food comes from," he says gently.

"That's different," Adam replies. "That's just…killing. Slaughtering pigs. Dad is a *murderer*."

Will tilts his head to one side. "How do you figure?"

"He told me what happened. With your old boss," he says. Will blinks at him. "He told me how he killed him. But if you didn't eat him, it's just murder. He *killed* someone."

Will's frown deepens, and he wets his lips, and wonders why Hannibal would lie about what happened that night. "He told you about Jack?" he asks.

Adam nods. "He told me about all of it. The Chesapeake Ripper. The way you guys met, and how you fled to Italy when the guy realized who and what dad was."

He stops, and Will watches him for a moment. It wouldn't do good to undermine Hannibal's integrity, but he will have to ask, later, why Hannibal changed the story. "Did he tell you why he did it?" he whispers.

Adam nods. "He said that Jack guy hurt you, that he was hurting you. And after you were mated, he tried to separate you two."

Will swallows. "So, you understand, don't you?" he asks, resting his hand on Adam's shoulder again. "Your father is a very proud man, and I had been under Jack's thumb for a long time. The only way we could be free of him was to remove him from the picture entirely."

Adam's eyes snap to him, wide and unsure. "So it's true?" he whispers. "He hurt you?"

Will's eyes drop. Then, he reaches for the collar of his shirt, pulls it to one side to reveal the bullet hole scar in his shoulder. "Jack's gun did this," he says, ignoring the strange, guilty clench in his gut that is demanding why he's lying to his child. Why he doesn't add that he was the one who pulled the trigger.

Adam's eyes widen further, and a sharp growl falls from behind his teeth. He reaches out, fingers shaking, and gently brushes over the round mark on Will's shoulder. Will bites his lower lip, fingers twitching like he can still feel the pain of it, shredding his muscles and cracking bone. Even now, cold weather sometimes irritates the old wound.

"Your father and I took heavy blows that night," he says, whisper-quiet.

Adam swallows, and he nods, a wash of forgiveness softening his tight jaw and dark eyes.

"Is that why you train us so hard?" Adam asks. "Is someone after us?"

Will sighs, and shakes his head. "I'm not sure," he replies. "But in that uncertainty, your father and I are all the more wary. There are people out there who don't understand us – our way of life, our diet. They don't look at the world like you do, Adam."

Adam nods. His fingers curl and fall from Will's shoulder, and Will lets his shirt settle back in place. "I'd never let anything happen to you," he says fiercely. "Or my sisters."

Will smiles, and cups his son's face, bringing him in to kiss his forehead. "I know, my little hunter," he says, soft with pride. Adam smiles, nuzzling his shoulder when Will releases his face. "Where is your father?"

"He went out," Adam replies. "Said he was going to the pharmacy." He pulls back, another darkness clouding his eyes, and bites his lower lip. "I'm going to present soon."

Will nods. Adam's birthday looms like a storm cloud, and though it is a cause for celebration, no one really anticipates the kind of loss of control a heat or rut can bring. Even mated as he is, and happy with his family, Will has always felt some small thread of anxiety when the changes come over his body. He is glad that, with his pregnancy, he will not be destined to repeat it for some time.

Adam swallows, looking down at his lap. "What's it like?" he whispers.

Will presses his lips together, and takes Adam's hands in his own. "I cannot say for certain," he replies. "I have never experienced a rut like you will, or your father has."

Adam frowns. "He told me you rutted," he says. "Once."

Will nods. "That's true. But it only lasted for a short time, and I'm not sure how it compares to a natural one. I can only say…it feels like you're burning from the inside, and it's very possible you will feel certain sexual compulsions, although your father and I will keep you confined to your room to ride them out."

Adam winces. "That doesn't sound pleasant at all," he complains.

"I'm afraid it's not, baby," Will murmurs, smiling sadly. "Without companionship, it will be very unpleasant. But it's necessary – the day you rut, you will be a man, and be able to experience the world as your father does. And I don't believe it's meant to last very long – a little over a day at most. You will be hungry, and you will be energetic, but your sister and I will make sure you're taken care of."

Adam frowns. "Not dad?" he asks, sounding small.

Will shakes his head. "I don't think it would be good for you to be around an Alpha when going through your first rut," he says. "Neither, for your father. You may incense one another."

"And what about you?" Adam asks, wide-eyed. "I won't…affect you, will I?"

Will smiles, and shakes his head again. "I'm mated," he replies. "And your mother. You won't have to worry about hurting me."

Adam blows out a heavy breath, nodding absently. His dark eyes leave Will's, skirt back to the hearth, and he sighs again. "Okay," he says quietly. "I trust you."

Will smiles, and then his head snaps up at a knock on the door. He frowns – Shannon and Mischa and Hannibal all have keys, and none of them would think to knock if they had an abundance of possessions to carry inside. He goes tense when Adam looks to the door as well, and seems to reach the same conclusion as Will.

They both stand, and Adam takes the lead, prowling through the door and looking at the peephole. He sighs. "Just a package," he says, and steps back so Will can answer the door.

He opens it, greeted with the sight of a tall, dark-skinned Alpha. The man smiles at him, wide, teeth gleaming. "Will Lecter?" he asks.

Will's eyes widen. "Um." Despite the fact that he and Hannibal are mated, and therefore Will could have taken his last name, they never had a chance to make it official before fleeing America and becoming Doctor and Mister Fell. A cold, harsh knot of fear balls itself up in the back of his neck. He looks down at the package in the man's hand. It's a yellow envelope, the kind important documents are mailed in.

He looks at the guy, notes his uniform as being that of the Post Office, his nametag reading 'Darren'. In case he and Hannibal need to go hunting later. "Yes," he finally says.

Darren smiles. "Sign here, please," he says, and hands Will a clipboard. Will signs his initials quickly and takes the package. "You have a good day."

"Thank you," Will says, shutting the door and turning from it. "Call your father," he says.

Adam nods, fleeing to retrieve his cell phone from his room, and Will walks zombie-like to the dining room, sitting down in his usual space. He looks at the address sticker on the front, and indeed, it is addressed to 'William Lecter', and has his home address on it. The return address appears to be from some kind of attorney's office. In Louisiana.

"Dad, you need to come home right now." Adam's voice floats in from the other room, as he emerges in the doorway and comes to the table. "Someone just mailed mom a package, and they used your real last name."

There's a pause, and then Adam hangs up. "He's on his way," he says, and Will breathes out, glad that the pharmacy isn't far away. Hannibal should be here in less than ten minutes if he leaves right away.

He sets the envelope down in front of him, flips it over to reveal the sealed back. His fingers tremble, and curl.

Adam reaches across the table, brushes his fingertips over Will's knuckles, and Will raises his eyes. "Open it," he says gently.

Will swallows, and nods, tucking his fingers under the edge and tearing the envelope open. From within it, he takes out an official-looking letter, notarized and dated for the week before, as well as a thin collection of papers stapled together.

He takes the letter first.

"To William Shannon Lecter,

Contained in this document is the executed Last Will and Testament of William James Graham -."

He stops.

Adam sucks in a harsh breath, and when Will looks at him, his eyes are wide. "Is that…your birthmother?" he asks weakly.

Will nods, scouring the rest of the document. "He died," he says, and his tone is flat. He's not sure he could name the emotion he's feeling – perhaps he is feeling too many, or none at all. He hasn't seen his mother, nor the woman he married after Will's sire left, since he moved to Virginia, almost thirty years ago. "Liver cancer."

Adam lets out a soft, sympathetic noise. "Mom, I'm so sorry."

Will breathes out, settling the letter down, and looks to the stack of papers. "It's a letter asking me to come back to Louisiana. He named me as the executor of his will." A will that Will signed when he was still a teenager.

Adam blinks. "Did he not mate?"

"He did," Will breathes, shaking his head. "But, I mean, they could be divorced for all I know. Or she might have died first. I don't -."

His stomach clenches, and he feels sick. He stands, and Hannibal's headlights flash behind the front door. It opens moments later, and Will collapses back down as he hurries inside.

"Will, darling, what happened?" Hannibal says, coming to his side immediately. Will knows his scent is sour with distress, thick with anxiety. He shakes his head and slides the letter to Hannibal without a word. Hannibal takes it, reading it quickly.

"…Oh," he says, and sets it down, before he pulls Will up into a hug, embracing him tightly. Will buries his face in his Alpha's neck, his exhale shaky, hands trembling. "I'm so sorry, my love."

Will takes a deep breath, lets his Alpha's scent and touch calm him. His eyes are wet, though he's not sure if it's from genuine sorrow or out of reflex. He wipes at his eyes and looks down at the envelope and stack of papers.

"Does this mean we're going to America?" Adam asks quietly.

"No," Will says, at the same time Hannibal says 'Yes'.

Will frowns at him. "*No*," he repeats, watching as Hannibal regards him with surprise. "There's nothing in that house I need, or want. And there's – no. We can't leave. Let the state handle it."

"Darling," Hannibal says gently, his hands on Will's shoulders and forcing their eyes to meet. "Normally, I would agree with you, but he's your mother. Surely you would want to attend his funeral, at least."

Will shakes his head, his chest tight with anxiety. He shrugs Hannibal's hands off. "You're missing the *point*," he hisses.

Hannibal's eyes flash to Adam, and he clears his throat. "Adam, would you mind giving us some privacy?"

Adam nods, his eyes wide. He takes his phone and goes to his room.

"Will -."

"He knew your name," Will growls, baring his teeth. "It's addressed to 'Will Lecter'. That means there's someone there who *knows* where I am, and how to find me. How to find *you*."

"And do you not think this person warrants a visit from us?" Hannibal replies, mild in the face of Will's chaotic anxiety. Will growls at him in answer. "Will, if someone could find us this easily, we owe it to our children to figure out how."

Will runs his hands through his hair, gritting his teeth. "It's too – no. We can't. I can't just leave."

"Of course not," Hannibal says. "We will all go."

"Didn't you just hear what I said?" Will demands. "Adam could go into rut any day now, and Mischa's visiting with her boyfriend, and Shannon's not -. They're not *ready*." Hannibal sighs. "And our faces – they might be looking for us, still, in America. We don't know what they found in your house. We don't know what we might be walking into, and I'll be damned if I put my children in danger because of, because…"

He falls silent, choking from the base of his throat. He's definitely going to be sick.

He holds his stomach, dry-heaving, and Hannibal's hands flatten over his spine, rubbing up and down. Will whimpers, turning his head to touch his sweaty forehead to Hannibal's cheek.

Hannibal's purr is quiet, attempting to soothe him, and Will is momentarily panicked when it doesn't work. "They're not ready, Hannibal," he says.

"Will," Hannibal replies, "if we've been discovered, if your mother's lawyer can find us, then we might not have a choice."

And Will knows he's right, but he doesn't have to be happy about it.

"I can't deal with this right now," he declares, shrugging his mate's touch away, even when something inside of him howls at the removal of Hannibal's warmth. "I have to think about it."

"Of course," Hannibal murmurs, as accommodating and understanding as he always has been. He cups Will's jaw, brushes their noses together and touches their foreheads to each other's. "Whatever you decide, I will of course support you, but I have never wanted you to be afraid. I have never known you to allow the possibility of what might be stop you from taking what you want."

"It's different," Will replies. "I can't just think about myself anymore."

Hannibal smiles, though it's sad. "Then allow me to share some of your burden," he says gently. He kisses Will, chaste and soft, and Will's stomach finally settles. "You are not alone, mylimasis."

Beloved.

At that, Will manages a small smile. "I know," he replies, and touches Hannibal's cheek. "I know."

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> warning for hannibal being kind of a dick. not as much of a dick as he was in 'First' and certainly not as much in common, but yeah.

Hannibal's ability to soothe Will is only temporary. Will goes to the bedroom, too on-edge to be around his children at the moment, and Hannibal follows him with his pharmacy bag in hand.

Will nods to it. "What did you get?"

Hannibal sets the bag down, opens it and pulls out two white bottles. "Prenatal vitamins," he says, looking to Will as though to gauge his reaction. Will's stomach clenches up in anxiety, and he swallows and looks away.

"Right," he murmurs, and sits down heavily on the bed, running his hands through his hair. "*Fuck*."

"Talk to me, darling," Hannibal says, as soft as he can manage. He kneels at Will's feet and takes his hands in both his own, and Will shakes his head, keeps his gaze lowered so he doesn’t meet Hannibal's eyes.

He breathes out, curls his fingers between his mate's. "I don't want to go to Louisiana," he says.

Hannibal sighs, but Will keeps speaking before he can say anything; "I won't go alone, and I won't bring you or our children either. I have to be here. We're safe here."

He feels Hannibal's hands tighten, and when he looks up, Hannibal's expression is a strange mix of sympathy and confusion. His eyes are dark. "Do you doubt my ability to keep you safe?" he asks.

Will bares his teeth, yanks his hands away. "It's not always about what you can or cannot do, Hannibal," he growls. His Alpha's pride is a fierce, solid thing, that has claws and yellow eyes that blink to him in moments of darkness. "If we go, it's a week, minimum, to get everything sorted out. What if Adam ruts while we're there?"

"I'm sure there is a guest bedroom in your mother's house we could utilize," Hannibal replies mildly. He's sitting back on his heels, giving Will a modicum of extra space, but not fleeing. He never flees. Will doesn't think he has it in him – even now, he can barely be persuaded to follow, without the right incentive.

Will presses his lips together, wets them, snaps his jaws tight. "And what about Mischa?" he demands through clenched teeth. "We can't leave her behind."

"She'll come with us, then," Hannibal says with a shrug, like it's the most obvious answer in the world.

Will sighs, leans his elbows on his knees and rakes his nails through his hair. He is silent, trying to think, trying to come up with the right words to convince Hannibal that this is a *bad idea*. And it is, Will is sure of it – a monumentally bad idea.

He hears Hannibal sigh, and closes his eyes. "Will," he begins, and Will huffs when Hannibal's fingers curl under his chin, force his head up. He wants to pull away, childish and stubborn, but he doesn't. After so many years it's difficult to resist Hannibal at the best of times, but when he's gentle, and coaxing like that? Will is helpless.

He whines when his eyes meet Hannibal's, finds them dark and flecked with red. "I keep circling around the fact that they *found* us," Will says. His upper lip twitches, shows his teeth. "Some two-bit lawyer in the middle of Goddamn swamp country found us. Knew your name."

Hannibal nods, and stands, before he turns and settles by Will's side on the bed. He takes one of Will's hands from his neck, folds both of his over it, and kisses Will's knuckles. "Alright," he says, and Will blinks at him. "Walk me through it. How could they have found us?"

Will growls, and shakes his head. "I don't know," he murmurs. "We were so careful, and it's been so long."

Hannibal nods. "Let's think about this, then," he continues. His voice is low and even, and Will instinctively wants to be soothed, but he doesn't – he holds onto his anxiety and irritation, clings to it like the side of cliffs, and refuses to let go. "We are operating under the assumption that this was spurned by the death of your mother."

Will swallows, and nods, and doesn't try to examine why that doesn't cause even a flicker of sadness in him. He hasn't seen or talked to the man for years, way before he fled the country with Hannibal. They were close when Will was a kid, but fell away from each other when he moved to Virginia. Will honestly can't remember the last time they spoke, or he heard his voice.

It wasn't a case of having a fight, or losing interest in one another. The Grahams were never particularly communicative men, preferring silence and solitude over the glaring noise of the outside world and those within it. Will had always been certain, if something momentous were to happen, his mother would have told him. Then again, Will has mated, and has three children who will never know his birthmother.

"You told me you had a female adult, when you were young," Hannibal continues, and Will nods. "What happened to her?"

"I'm not sure," Will replies, licking his lips. His brain is changing gears, he can feel it like walking onto a crime scene. He closes his eyes, imagines the gold of the pendulum swinging

in front of him, and when he opens them again, he sees his mother and his wife, sees them sitting in those big corduroy red recliners, watching television.

He walks forward, stands between them, and turns his head to view the female. She's a kind-looking, matronly sort of woman, has been ever since Will knew her. She had no children of her own, gave Will no siblings.

"They might have gotten divorced," Will says, touching the back of her chair. "Or she could have died. I don't know. We weren't -." He stops, clears his throat. "We weren't like that, as a family. Death was never something we mourned, or even acknowledged."

In his mind's eye, a dog pads between the chairs and the television, trots in front of the chairs and through the back door to the garden. It's the overgrown mop, Will's childhood dog that he told Hannibal about when they played Chess. Will follows, and finds a version of himself, eight years old, kneeling in front of the patch of dirt where they buried his dog. He hadn't cried, then. No one had. They'd waited a week before getting another animal.

"So we must assume she's no longer in the picture, one way or the other."

Hannibal's voice startles him, and Will turns, sees his mate standing at the back door of his childhood home. Hannibal looks so out of place there, refined and regal amidst the rotting wood and peeling siding. Still, Will smiles at him, and Hannibal smiles back.

"You are the only living relative?" Hannibal asks.

"I had an uncle," Will replies. "Cousins. But I haven't seen them since I moved away."

"Do you think your mother would have left anything to them?"

Will shakes his head. "No," he replies. "Anything of value he would have left to me."

Hannibal nods, and steps forward, sets an arm on Will's shoulder. Will feels it physically, the warmth of his Alpha, and sighs, closing his eyes.

The pendulum swings again.

The garden clears, and Will is at his mother's desk, watching him make fishing lures. There's a stack of papers, the same stack Will received in the mail, and Will is reading over it. Bill Graham had wanted him to understand what Will was signing before he did so.

"He gave me the right to pull the plug on him, if it came to that," Will says, sighing as he watches his teenage self turn the page. Then, a thought occurs to him, and he frowns.

He opens his eyes and turns to Hannibal. "When we mated, any rights I had to oversee my mother's will would have gone to you."

Hannibal tilts his head, a pleased light in his eyes, like Will is following a trail of breadcrumbs he left.

"It was addressed to your name, but to me, personally," Will adds. "That means that…"

He pauses, tries to think. Tries to remember the laws and how they might have changed in America.

Clarity snaps to him like a broken rubber band. "There's only one person alive who knows you and I mated," he murmurs, and looks to Hannibal again. "For certain. Only one person I know determined enough to have tracked us down after all this time."

Hannibal blinks, slow like a pleased cat, and his smile widens. "Alana."

"She couldn't have anything to do with this," Will says, though it's weak. He feels, in his own eyes, the desperate need for Hannibal to reassure him, to tell him that he's talking crazy, that it's all in his head. Many have tried to talk him down from the edge of intuition's leap, to tell him it's not real, *it's not real*, and yet -. "It's been -. Come on, Hannibal, it's been almost twenty years. There's no *way* that…"

"Alana is a steadfastly loyal soul," Hannibal murmurs, his fingers tracing idle from Will's shoulders to gently brush his cheek. "It is possible, even now, that she believes you are under my influence in some way. That she thinks I am keeping you, locked away, robbing you of your freedom. Even that you might desire me in turn."

"Stockholm syndrome?" Will hisses, blanching at the words.

Hannibal shrugs one shoulder. "If memory serves, she was always intrigued by the idea," he says mildly. "It would follow that she might try to reach out to you, the only way she knows you might react."

"Through my mother," Will breathes.

Hannibal nods. "Through your mother," he says back.

"That's insane," Will mutters. He stands, unable to be still a second longer. Hannibal's warmth leaves his side and he wants to return immediately, but he can't – he paces, agitated like a caged tiger, and whirls on Hannibal. "No. She would have tried something before now."

"Perhaps she was unable to," Hannibal says. He's sitting forward, watching Will intently. "There is no reason to believe that your mother's passing is being faked. She waited, and bided her time." He pauses, rakes his eyes slow up and down Will's body. "As I did."

Will stops pacing, snarls without direction. Alana had connections with the FBI, even past Will and Jack. It's entirely possible that, in the time that has passed, she grew her network, strengthened it, until she met the right person who could give her what she wanted.

"That settles it, then," he declares. "We're not going."

Hannibal smiles, and stands. "On the contrary," he says mildly, "I think it would be rude not to answer an old friend's invitation."

Will blinks, stares at his mate, lips parted. "You can't be serious," he says weakly.

"You admitted that the rights to your mother's estate are mine, through our union," Hannibal continues. Will can hardly believe what he's hearing. "I will take Adam, and Shannon, and Mischa, if she wants to come. We will go to America together."

"I'm not letting you take my children away from me," Will snarls.

Hannibal's smile is wide, and reminds Will of how he'd looked when Will was finally in his bed. The scent of him is thick, sharp, spiced with capsaicin and salt.

"Then I suppose you have no choice but to come with us."

The sound Will lets out, he is sure, isn't entirely human. He bares his teeth, feels the itch behind his eyes that means the gold is flaring, and lets out a rough, wild laugh. "So that's it, is it?" he demands. He's not sure whether he's more angry or outraged at Hannibal's behavior. "Where Alpha goes, Omega follows."

Hannibal sighs through his nose, reaches for him. "Will -."

"No," Will snarls, batting his hand away. "Don't fucking touch me. I can't *believe* you." Anger is winning out now – it boils in him, catches in his throat, a hard knot of iron and venom that makes his tongue feel sour. He glares at Hannibal and bares his teeth, shows Hannibal all of them that he can. Oh, how he wants to lash out physically, to sink his teeth into his mate's neck, force his submission. Will is younger, is faster, he doesn't spar as much as Hannibal does but he's not weak, he's not feeble and demure like the rest of his breed are.

He can fight. He *wants* to.

But physically attacking Hannibal won't send the message he wants to. No, he has to play this right. Not aggressive – that's what Hannibal expects. Will's ferocity has been honed to something sharp and poisoned, fine-tuned to slide between ribs and find the heart.

"You'd endanger me," he spits, lifts his eyes and forces himself to hold Hannibal's gaze. "Your children. Your *unborn child*."

Hannibal blinks, pressing his lips together, his eyes dragging down to Will's stomach. Will lets him stare, keeps his arms by his side so Hannibal can *look*. "You must be so fucking bored," Will adds, and Hannibal's eyes snap to him. "So *unsatisfied* with your life. Always looking to prove yourself – just like every other Alpha."

That lands. Hannibal's jaw clenches and his eyes flash, redden at the center.

Will watches as Hannibal takes a deep breath through his nose, eagerly slicks the scent of Hannibal's anger across the roof of his mouth, and Hannibal turns his face away, sets his eyes to the door. They close, open again, and Hannibal's shoulders roll.

"You're upset," he says quietly.

Will doesn't respond. Lets him stew, lets him settle. Anger works best in waves and crests, as it builds and withers the foundations of restraint. Will watches, a smile cracking his face wide, sharp at the edges.

"It's been so long, hasn't it, my love?" he purrs. Hannibal's eyes flash to him, and Will can tell he's surprised at the sudden softening of Will's voice. Will gentles his smile, steps forward and slides his hands into place on Hannibal's chest. "When did we last hunt? A week ago? We are so…scheduled, now, arrange our artistry like old married couples arrange sex on date nights."

Hannibal's jaw clenches again. He wraps his hands around Will's, pulls them back. "You know that's not how I feel," he replies.

And Will knows that. Hannibal's love has never faded – he trembles with joy at Will's touch, even now, sensing a promise of relief Will has no intention of giving.

"Oh, but it must be," Will continues, low, soothing. Luring the fish towards his hook. Hannibal swims forward eagerly, his expression softening as Will regards him. Will leans in, touches his nose feather-light to Hannibal's neck. "First you lie to my son, and now you're forcing me to walk into what might be a trap laid out by our 'old friend'."

He growls the words, and shoves Hannibal back. As close as they are to the bed, Hannibal sits down on it immediately, unable to keep his balance. Will's anger spins between them, a thick web the color of blood and viscera. Hannibal tries to stand and Will snarls at him, Omega Voice coming through and rumbling in his chest.

"Sit down," he commands, and Hannibal goes still immediately. His eyes widen, just a fraction, and he looks up at Will. Will can barely see past the black cloud of anger behind his eyes, but he hopes he's gutting Hannibal to the bone, hopes it hurts.

He doesn't touch. Hannibal can still overpower him, given the right pressure in the right places. His fingers curl and he growls, stepping away. "Adam told me what you said to him," he says, quiet, curt. "He told me you said you killed Jack. Alone. Why?"

Hannibal sighs.

"No platitudes," Will demands. "No pretty words."

Hannibal meets his eyes. "Adam loves you very much," he says, and Will snarls in warning. "If he reacted poorly, I didn't want the way he looks at you to change."

"You made it all about you," Will hisses. "Just another Alpha, rescuing the sweet little Omega who can't defend his own Goddamn self. I saved *you*," he says. "It was all my plan. *My* design. And you took it from me. You can't share a single Goddamn thing, can you?"

"Will, stop."

Will's jaws snap shut, and he growls at the sound of Hannibal's Voice, forcing his teeth to grind together, stopping his words. He turns away, folds his arms across his chest, and shakes his head sharply, like if he moves swiftly enough, he can free his mouth.

He hears Hannibal stand, turns his head and glares at him, but Hannibal embraces him, hands gentle on Will's flanks, lips soft and warm against his neck. Will shivers, turns sharper and

digs the nails of one hand into the side of Hannibal's neck.

A warning, since he cannot bite.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs, his exhale warm on Will's neck, and Will trembles in his arms, closes his eyes and doggedly clings to the anger sitting hot in his spine. "I will admit, my pride is my greatest sin, but please, never, *never* think that I would purposely rob you of your achievements."

Will growls, his throat tight with the desire to fling more venom at Hannibal.

"I know anything I say, with how you're feeling, will be misconstrued as manipulation. So I won't say anything. I won't try to convince you."

Will whines, hates the sound of it, and one of Hannibal's hands comes up and slides gently over his lips.

"Speak," Hannibal says.

Will gasps, sagging forward, his mouth parted as he closes his eyes and tries to catch his breath. He's strung up, in static, trembling with the desire to turn and lunge for Hannibal, to rip at his throat, claw at his chest, render him as used and torn-open as Will feels.

He doesn't. He can't.

"Let go of me," he says.

Hannibal releases him at once and Will staggers to the wall by the bathroom, turns and puts his shoulders against it, doesn't like how heavily he leans against it to keep himself upright. His neck burns from Hannibal's mouth and his chest is hot with vitriol, with rage.

Still, with love.

He breathes deeply, eyes Hannibal's posture, which is straight and yet leaning, like he wants to give chase. Will turns his gaze away. "I want you to leave," he says. He can't look at Hannibal right now, not like this. "Just…leave me alone."

Hannibal sighs, but he nods, for which Will is grateful. He takes off his coat and places it on a dresser, and goes to the door.

He stops there, and turns to look at Will. "One of the things I have most admired about you is your ability to project," he says.

Will's upper lip twitches. "What's your point?"

Hannibal smiles. "Are you bored, my love?"

Will cannot answer that. He doesn't want to.

"Leave," he whispers, his voice hoarse.

Hannibal nods, and opens the door. "Make sure to take your vitamins," he says, and then he leaves, shutting the door behind him. Abruptly, Will slides down the wall to his heels, the fight drained out of him. He puts his head in his hands and breathes deep, tries to push back the tides of anger, the lingering flicker-fires of outrage and indignation.

He sucks in a shaky, deep breath, lets it out just as slowly. Though the feeling is older than Mischa, he remembers what it was like to be in rut, and wonders if it can be triggered in an Omega like him from rage alone. His hands are shaking like he's coming down from an adrenaline surge, and his stomach aches like he might be sick.

He stands, and goes to Hannibal's coat, folds it up and presses it to his face. Breathes in his scent. It settles him, the scent buried too deep in his hindbrain to be ignored.

He goes to the bed, takes the bottles of vitamins and sets them to one side for later. Hannibal's tablet is on the nightstand and, after a moment, he takes it, opens it and brings up a blank Google page.

Within the search, he types in 'Doctor Alana Bloom'. He settles down, Hannibal's coat as his pillow, and starts to read.

He wakes when the door opens, stirring and rolling onto his side to find Hannibal's shadow approaching him. He sighs, locks the tablet and sets it back in place, and clings to Hannibal's coat as the Alpha comes to a halt at his side. Hannibal regards him, and Will stares right back. It has always been, he found, in their silences, that the truth springs up most eagerly.

The look in Hannibal's eyes reminds him of their first hunt together. The first week in Florence after Will was well enough to move, the gunshot in his shoulder healed. Hannibal had taken him by the hair and mounted him right there, in the middle of a dark alley, blood still slicking their shoes. His power, his desire, had coated Will to the bare bones, settled him as well as a hand on his neck or teeth at his nape. Through it all, neither Will nor Hannibal had stopped purring, touching each other with rain-slick hands, found satisfaction in each other's sweat and heat and nothing – not the rough stone wall, the cold air, the scent of decaying flesh – had touched them.

Though he cannot be sure, for the nights spent bare for each other have always been frequent and it's rare for an Omega to conceive outside of heat, Will likes to imagine they conceived Mischa that night.

Will sighs again, closing his eyes. "I hate fighting with you," he murmurs.

Hannibal's purr is soft, almost tentative. He crouches by the bed and settles his touch on the back of Will's hand and Will opens his eyes.

He offers a smile. "Mischa is here," he says.

Will's eyes widen. He sits up abruptly. "What?" he demands.

"Adam called her, apparently," Hannibal replies. "She has a bag."

Will frowns, wiping his hands over his face. "Did she bring her boyfriend?"

"No."

"How long has she been here?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles, standing, and holds out a hand. "I came to get you as soon as she arrived," he says. Will nods, taking his hand and allowing Hannibal to pull him to his feet. "Will, darling – I wanted -."

Will stops, meets Hannibal's eyes. They're still the same dark whiskey-brown, very little red to them from their argument before. Hannibal has always been calmed by the presence of their children.

Hannibal sighs, and cups Will's face, resting their foreheads together. "I need to apologize," he says. "I behaved very rudely towards you, and allowed myself to be overcome with anger. I should never – I *will* never usurp your desires or deny you them."

Will swallows, feeling meek in the face of Hannibal's earnest speech. "You still want to go, though," he says.

Hannibal nods. "I was hoping you might consider something," he says. Will blinks, pulling back so he can watch his Alpha's face. "This decision affects all of us, as you rightly pointed out. In light of that, I was wondering if you'd be agreeable to the idea of a vote."

Will blinks, brow furrowing. "A vote?" he repeats.

"Yes," Hannibal says with a nod. "We can explain to Adam, Mischa, and Shannon the full extent of this situation. Tell them everything, and then decide, as a family, how to proceed."

Will tilts his head to one side, and Hannibal's touch falls away. He searches Hannibal's eyes, finds no trace of deception or deeper designs within them. He licks his lips, looks away. "A vote," he repeats.

It's a fair idea. After all, their children are almost all adults in the eyes of the law. Once Adam presents, he will gain most agency except the ability to purchase cigarettes or alcohol. Alphas are given most freedoms, including the fight to vote in elections, when they turn sixteen.

There is no reason Will cannot apply that to his own house.

"That means telling them everything," he whispers. "About Alana. About Jack. The truth."

"And all its consequences," Hannibal finishes, smiling. "Yes."

Will considers this, one hand idly falling to his stomach. He bites his lip, rubs his hand over the smooth flesh there. If his previous pregnancies are any indication, he will not swell for

some time. His hindbrain flares in revulsion at the idea of that much stress, too worried over the idea of losing his child to want to continue, but Hannibal is right.

They are all part of this family, and as such, deserve to have their say.

But he also knows Hannibal well. He wouldn't suggest such a thing if he wasn't certain it would sway Will, or that he could be outvoted. Adam thinks too much like his father, is too much an Alpha through and through. He will want to go. He'd want to do whatever it took to protect his family.

Mischa and Shannon, though…. They have always seemed much more like Will.

He sighs. "I won't promise to agree," he finally says. "But I'll let them say their piece."

Hannibal smiles. "Thank you," he murmurs, almost a purr. Will shivers, shoulders rolling at the sound of it.

He turns away, and goes to the door. If Mischa is here, Will wants to see her. He opens the door and goes down the hallway, his chest bubbling with delight when he hears Mischa's low, warm laugh, coupled with Shannon's higher one. He enters the living room and comes to a halt, sees his children all piled together on the couch. Mischa is perched atop her siblings, Shannon with her back to an arm, legs splayed out for Adam to lay down on. Mischa has her heels dug into the other arm, and is holding both Adam and Shannon tightly, letting Adam nuzzle and scent-mark her and tugging playfully at Shannon's hair.

Her head snaps up when Will enters, and Will's breath catches. His eyes burn with gold, with tears, he can't tell, and his smile is wide.

"Hi, baby," he murmurs.

"Mama!" Mischa says, high with delight. Her blue eyes almost sparkle in the light coming through the large window, bright as they've always been. She throws herself off her siblings, almost jumps clear of the little coffee table, and barrels into Will's arms. Her hair is long enough to reach her legs now, tied in a thick braid in the same style Shannon adopted when her hair got long enough.

Will laughs, overwhelmed with joy as he embraces her. She tucks her face to his neck, breathing in deeply and wrapping her skinny arms tight around his chest. She's just an inch shy of Will's height, done growing now, and Will clutches at her back and breathes in her salt-jasmine scent. She inherited Hannibal's scent, but it's soft with femininity, and Will breathes it in eagerly, his chest aching with love as he holds her tight to him.

She pulls back as Hannibal's silhouette darkens the doorway behind him, and her smile remains unchanged, wide and eager, though her eyes turn serious. "Hi, papa," she breathes, and leaves Will's arms to hug Hannibal as well. Hannibal's purr is loud and though Mischa cannot hear it like Will can, she nuzzles Hannibal's collarbone and answers with a toneless roll of her own tongue.

"It's so good to see you, sweetheart," Will says, his throat tight when Mischa pulls back. She looks more like Hannibal now, with her strong jaw and sharp cheekbones. She has the kind of face Will thinks suitable for politics or a headmistress, wears a poker face to rival even Hannibal's when she wants to. The air changes with her passing through it.

Mischa regards him, and her eyes gentle. She cups Will's face and presses their foreheads together. "I came as soon as I heard," she murmurs. "I'm sorry, mama."

"It's alright," Will replies, his exhale unsteady. He rests his hands on her shoulders and shakes his head, pulling her into another hug. "You didn't have to come all this way, but I'm glad you're here."

She giggles, the sound lower than her sister's – caramel instead of diamond. She pulls back again and Hannibal sighs, brushing a stray wisp of hair from her face.

"You've gotten thin," he says mildly. "Have you been taking care of yourself?"

Mischa smiles, rolling her eyes. "Hard to hunt with exams," she replies. "And having a roommate makes things difficult." She's the only one of their children to have fully inherited an Italian accent, not so thick as to be native, but enough to blend when they lived there and spoke the language. Shannon's is less obvious, and Adam's voice chameleons its way from North American, Italian, English, whoever he's with.

"We will see you well-fed, then," Hannibal says.

Mischa nods, smiling, and her eyes alight on Will again. Will can't resist hugging her a third time, too stung-out on emotion to deny himself the instinct to wrap himself up in his daughter, to inhale her scent and mark her so she smells like their family again. He can catch traces of foreign Alpha on her – her boyfriend, he presumes – and wants to remove it entirely, possessive in a way unexplainable to anyone but another Omega.

Mischa sighs, sagging against him, her nose pressed tight to his neck. Then, she tenses, and pulls back. She holds Will at arm's length, head tilted, considering.

"What is it, Mish?" Shannon asks, finally sitting up enough that Adam does as well, and they both perch on the couch, legs crossed and elbows on knees.

Mischa frowns, and looks to her father, then back at Will. "Mama," she says, and bites her lower lip, flutters her lashes slowly as she takes another inhale. "Are you…pregnant?"

Will's breath catches. Mischa's sense of smell is as sharp as her father's, even for a woman. He flushes, bites his lower lip, looks to Hannibal who is regarding his daughter with a wide, proud smile.

"Holy shit," Adam breathes, his eyes wide. "Are you -? Really?"

Will clears his throat, and nods. "Yes," he says.

Shannon lets out a squeal of delight, standing up and running to Will's side, Adam in hot pursuit. Mischa turns, growling at them, and tugs Will to her almost protectively.

Will laughs, though it's a choked sound. "Stop it," he admonishes gently, reminded of how Mischa had reprimanded Shannon when Will was pregnant with Adam. "I'm not going to break."

Mischa smiles, lets Will go just enough that Hannibal's hand settles on his shoulder, and Shannon and Adam hold back, though Will can see how eager they are to catch a whiff of their own. He's sure they won't be able to smell it, not with Adam's senses unpresented and Shannon's duller than her sister's, but it's a sweet sentiment all the same.

"Now I'm *really* glad I came," Mischa declares, putting her hands on her hips. She looks to her siblings, one eyebrow raised in an expression so like Hannibal it makes Will's heart ache. "You really didn't know?"

Adam shakes his head, before he blinks, frowning, and looks to Will. "*That's* what that smell was?" he asks.

Will blushes, tries to laugh it off.

"What smell?"

"It was just…really sweet. I just thought mom was happy."

"I *am* happy," Will says, rolling his eyes.

"Yeah, but it was…different."

"He smells the same to me," Shannon says, huffing.

"It will get more obvious as your mother progresses in his pregnancy," Hannibal explains, softening the blow of their dulled senses. "Mischa, do you need help with your bags? Your room is open, for however long you'd like to stay."

"I'm good," Mischa replies. "Shannon and I put them in."

"Excellent," Hannibal murmurs, and Will smiles when his fingers tighten on Will's shoulder in a gentle squeeze. "Well, you must be hungry. I'll make us something to eat."

Mischa's eyes light up, and she grins. "Can I help?" she asks. "The kitchen allotment in the dorms is *abysmal*. I've missed your cooking."

"Of course," Hannibal says, and lets Will go.

Mischa nods, and they all follow Hannibal's lead towards the kitchen. Upon reaching the dining room, Will stops there, and takes his normal seat. Shannon sits beside him, and Adam across from her, freeing up Mischa's usual space.

They settle into their places and Mischa follows Hannibal into the kitchen. Soon the air becomes warm and rich with the scents of cooking meat, and Will lets out an appreciative sigh.

Adam eyes him, his phone in his hand, and drums the corner nervously on the table. "I hope you don't mind that I called her," he says quietly. Will tilts his head to one side. "I just figured –. I mean, I never met your mom, but I figured we should all be here. As a family."

Will smiles, sighing. "I'm glad you called her," he replies gently. "I'm not upset."

Adam nods, pressing his lips together, and looks down at his phone as it chimes. He smiles at it, swiping it and typing out a reply.

"Helena?"

He nods, his cheeks coloring a light pink.

Shannon grins. "Adam's got a girlfriend," she singsongs, laughing when Adam's cheeks darken.

"She's not my girlfriend," he protests, though it's halfhearted.

"Who's not his girlfriend?" Mischa says, bringing out two plates piled high with food. Hannibal is right behind her with three plates, and they serve out the meals, and Hannibal goes back to the kitchen to retrieve knives and forks.

"She's just this girl in my school," Adam says as Mischa sits beside him. Hannibal returns with a tray of glasses of water and silverware, and serves them out without a word. His hand brushes gently across Will's shoulder, and then he takes his seat.

Mischa smiles at him. "Well, whoever you decide to court will be lucky to have you," she says.

Adam ducks his head, a gentle smile on his face. He leans across and rubs his forehead briefly on Mischa's shoulder, and they straighten to eat. Each plate has a serving of asparagus, cheesy potatoes, and slices of chicken breast. Will sighs. They will need to hunt soon – but, depending on how the night goes, they may not be able to.

As though sensing his thoughts, Hannibal clears his throat and straightens in his seat. "It is good that all of you are here," he says, regarding each of their children in turn. They turn to him, attentive as they always have been to their father. "As you know, there has been a death in the family. What troubles us more is the fact that Will's mother's lawyer was able to find us, and used my original last name on the label."

Mischa frowns, and lets out a soft growl, her knuckles whitening around her silverware.

"How did they find us?" she demands.

"We can't be sure," Hannibal says coolly, taking a drink of water. "Your mother and I have discussed it, and we have some idea of what this might entail, but what it comes down to is that this is a complicated situation. Staying, or going, poses different issues."

Shannon and Mischa exchange a look, and Shannon looks to Will and puts her hand over Will's in a gentle touch.

"What's going on?" she murmurs.

Will sighs, and offers her a smile. He looks to Hannibal, and sets his silverware down, bracing himself against the coming conversation.

"We have decided to put it to a vote," Will tells them. "Whether we stay, or go. But, before we do, your father and I need to tell you the truth about what happened that brought us to Italy. All of it."

He presses his lips together, meets his children's eyes in turn, before looking to Hannibal. Hannibal offers him a gentle, encouraging smile. Will answers it, steels his resolve, and looks away from him again.

"Alright," he breathes, shoulders rolling. "Well, to start, I guess I'd have to say that, back in America, I used to work for the FBI. I met your father during that time. Between us, we had two mutual acquaintances. Alana Bloom, and Jack Crawford…"

Chapter 5

By the time Will is done telling his story, his voice is hoarse. It finishes with his and Hannibal's conclusion that Alana may have been the one to track Will down and find their address for the papers he'd been served.

He takes a drink of water, his throat sore, and swallows harshly, setting the glass back down. "I did some research on Alana, before you got here," he adds, nodding to Mischa. "She's married now, and has a son a little older than Adam. An Alpha, sired by her brother-in-law."

Hannibal frowns at him. "Who did she marry?" he asks.

"Margot Verger," Will replies, though he's sure Hannibal had done research of his own, while Will napped. He finds it impossible to think that the Alpha hadn't been just as intrigued as he had, and filled the time between their fight and Mischa's arrival on Adam's laptop or Shannon's tablet while Will was using his.

"Verger," he repeats, blinking, and his expression clears with recognition. "The meat-packing tycoons. I remember Margot, and her brother." He hums, leaning on one armrest and idly playing with his fork. "He's deceased now, I believe."

Will nods. "Died shortly before their son was born."

Hannibal smiles, faint and almost proud. "Well, I don't want to speak ill of the dead, but I will say it's probably for the best that he will not be around, should we decide to go."

Will frowns, but doesn't address that. Hannibal speaks with too much certainty, like it's already been decided. He looks to his children, finds them wearing expressions that broadly encompass confusion, anger, and challenge in equal measure. Mischa looks ready to fly to Baltimore and start a fight.

So, too, does Adam.

"We should move," Shannon says after a moment, whisper-quiet. "If she found us, we're not safe here."

"Would we be safe anywhere else?" Mischa asks, her low voice cutting and sharp. "If this Alana has ties to the FBI *and* she's married into money, that's a lot of resources that we don't have. I mean." She sighs. "We have money, sure, but not *heiress* money."

"That is true," Hannibal says mildly. "I am of the opinion that we should pay Alana a visit."

Adam blinks at him, his frown heavy on his young face. It makes him look so much older, so much like his father that Will can't bear to look at him. "We shouldn't go to Louisiana," he says, and Will nods. "We should go to Maryland instead. To Baltimore."

"We can't go to Baltimore," Will argues. "Time has passed, yes, but for all we know they might still be looking for us. We killed a man in your father's house."

"And framed it as self-defense," Mischa says. "No court would convict you."

"But that defense hinges on Alana's testimony, which she may have changed once she thought she was safe," Will replies, trying to keep his voice even and reasonable. "If our theory is true, and she waited all this time for an opportunity to find and contact me, then she won't have forgotten."

He looks at Hannibal. "She won't have forgiven."

Hannibal smiles. "Hell hath no fury," he murmurs.

"Well, screw that!" Mischa says. Her eyes are bright with anger, her jaw clenched and her knuckles still white on the edge of the table. Hell hath no fury, indeed. "If *anyone* thinks they can threaten our family I'll kick their ass to the moon and back to teach them a lesson."

Despite himself, Will laughs. "I don't think we need to be that dramatic, baby," he says gently.

Mischa rolls her eyes, baring her teeth.

They fall into silence, and Will watches his children in turn, trying to read the emotions as they cross each face. Children have always been at once difficult and easy to read – they feel their emotions genuinely, but his children are masters at secrecy, the best hunters of their generation, and they have learned to hold their feelings close to their chests, emulating their parents.

Shannon touches Will's hand, and offers a small smile when Will looks to her. "It's all or nothing, isn't it?" she asks. "Either we all go, or we all stay."

Will licks his lips, nodding.

"We think it would be best," Hannibal replies. "It is no secret that segregation and isolation is the way to exploit weakness. If we do go, we will all go. As a family."

Adam lets out a short, aggravated noise. "It could take a long time," he says, giving voice to the concern Will has mentioned already. "If I go, I might not be all that useful after a while." He clears his throat, his cheeks pink. "I'd be a distraction."

"You know, I think we're overlooking something kind of obvious," Shannon says after a moment. Will frowns, looking to her. "First, we need to establish if your mom is, in fact, dead. Then, we need to find out the name and office of this lawyer and see if it's legitimate and not just a shell corporation, or if it has anything to do with these Vergers. If they've even had anything that *looks* like contact with your family."

Will blinks at her, and she nods.

"We can't make any decision until we know that."

"I'll do research," Adam says. Mischa is nodding next to him and he smiles at her. "If it's anything less than kosher, we can sniff it out."

"Then what?" Will presses. "I just -." He growls, shakes his head once, sharply, and flattens his hands on his thighs. "I need to know what you all think now. Your instincts are sharp, your father and I raised you to be smart and to go with your gut. So, what is your opinion, right now?"

"Mama," Mischa begins, and then stops. Sighs.

Will presses his lips together. He knows the answer. His stomach clenches with anxiety and he breathes out, shoving his chair back from the table and standing. "Alright," he murmurs. He cups his stomach, glad that he can now that he doesn't have to worry about keeping his pregnancy a secret, and tries to soothe the mixed ache of nausea and hunger stirring low in his gut. "I'm just -. I need to lie down."

Mischa frowns, letting out a concerned noise. Hannibal, too, seems perturbed by Will's sudden need to leave.

"I'm alright," Will murmurs, and hopes he sounds reassuring. He settles a hand on Hannibal's shoulder as he passes. "Please, eat. I'll be back soon."

"Call for me if you need anything, mylimasis," Hannibal says.

Will nods, and he leaves the dining room, goes through the living room and into his bedroom. He pushes the door behind him until it is almost shut, and breathes out. His throat is thick, his eyes burning with a mix of impotent anger and distress. He's sure is scent is sour with it, if the looks on his family's faces were any indication.

He sits down heavily on the bed, and looks to the iPad, pulls it to his lap and unlocks it. His phone is in his pocket and he takes it out, fingers shaking. He searches Alana's office number and calls it.

"Doctor Bloom's office, Morgan speaking."

Morgan. That's the name of Alana's son. Will's breath catches, and he closes his eyes and tries not to think of his own children. "Good morning," he murmurs, stuttering over the time difference. It's still morning there. "This is -." He clears his throat, swallows. "Is Doctor Bloom available?"

"May I ask who's calling?"

He should hang up. This is foolish, reckless, even for him. "This is Tom Isaac," he says. "I worked with Doctor Bloom at the University, many years ago."

Morgan hums, and Will hears the plastic creak of someone shifting in their chair. "Alright. One moment while I transfer you."

Soothing music starts to play over the line, that reminds Will of meditation soundtracks, the kinds that get combined with ocean waves to lull people to sleep. His heart is hammering in

his chest, his fingers tight on his phone, and he waits, and each second that ticks by feels like an eternity.

Then, finally; "This is Doctor Bloom."

Will's exhale escapes him, all at once and trembling. "Alana," he breathes, closing his eyes.

She's silent for a moment. Then, confession-quiet; "…Will?"

Unbidden, a laugh escapes Will. He hadn't realized how much he missed her, missed her voice. She had always been a calming influence on him, especially in the darker days of working for Jack. Even with how he treated her, he had loved her all the more for how she had been prepared to defend him until Will made it clear he was in no need of a protector.

"Will? Oh my God, is that you?"

"Yeah," Will says, unable to keep his voice steady. He curls forward, rests his elbows on his knees, his free hand rubbing over his face and curling behind his neck. "Yeah, it's me."

"Will." Alana's voice is thick with tears, Will can hear them. Wonders if they're falling – if his own might, for how much is welling up behind his eyelids. "Jesus, I…. How are you? Are you alright? It's been…"

"Yes," Will replies. He had never imagined he'd be speaking to her again, hearing her voice. Time has softened her, and she sounds like he remembers his stepmother sounding. Warm, motherly, loving. His chest aches sharply and it's getting hard to breathe. "Yeah, I'm – I'm doing great. I mean."

He clears his throat, straightens up. "I shouldn't have called."

"No!" Alana's voice sharpens, stays his hand from ending the call. "Please. Please just…just stay on the line with me. I haven't…." She must be crying now, Will can barely hear her for how soft her voice has gotten.

Will clears his throat. "You have a son now. A wife."

"Yes," Alana says. "It's a long story."

"I bet," Will replies. "I, ah, I have kids, too. Three of them. And one on the way."

"That's incredible," Alana murmurs. But, in the silence, her tone hardens. "With Hannibal?"

"Yes," Will admits, and smiles when her silence turns tense.

"So you're still with him," she says.

Will nods, swallowing harshly. "I should go," he whispers.

"Will, wait, please!" she says, quickly, her voice softening again in a desperate plea. "We don't have to talk about that. We don't have to talk about any of that. I just…. Christ, Will, I

miss you. All this time I just wanted to know you were safe. That you were happy."

Will's chest clenches up sharply. It feels like being punched. He rubs at his sternum and wonders how the sound of an old friend's voice can hurt so much.

"Are you safe?" Alana asks. "Are you happy?"

Will closes his eyes again, bowing his head. He wants to believe that she had nothing to do with him being found. He wants to believe it so badly, wants to pretend that she's just an old friend, concerned for his wellbeing, and that all the ugly past behind them is exactly that – behind them.

But.

"My mother died," he says.

"I'm sorry," Alana replies. Will tries to detect if she even sounds surprised. She doesn't. It's harder to lie over the phone when there's no body language to read or be distracted by. Voices are harder to change.

"I'll be going to Louisiana soon to settle the estate," he tells her. "Just me."

"Will you come see me?" she asks, eagerly. "Or, or I could come see you. I'll fly down there. You can meet Margot, and Morgan."

Will doesn't want to smile. He doesn't want to agree.

His head jerks up as he hears the door open, and his breath catches when he sees Hannibal standing in the doorway. He's carrying a box.

"I have to go," he says, and hangs up to Alana's protest. He locks the iPad and sets his phone down on it, placing both on the bedside table.

Hannibal regards him for a moment, before he tilts his head. He closes the door behind him and walks to the miniature sitting area they have set up by the window that looks to the back garden. Will stands mutely, following him to it. He recognizes the marble inlay of the Chess set Hannibal bought him after Mischa was born. Will had been restless at the time, and acted out, and they had kept the time-honored tradition of using the game to talk about things that were otherwise too hard to speak of.

Hannibal sits, and Will perches opposite, watching as Hannibal slides out the little drawer full of pieces and begins to set the game. "Who do you think I shouldn't be hearing you talking to?" he asks.

Will huffs, shaking his head. "I think you know."

Hannibal pauses, his eyes meeting Will's. When he smiles, it's fond and affectionate. "Is your first instinct always to up the ante on an already dangerous game?" he murmurs.

Will bites his lower lip and rubs his hands over his jaw, sitting forward as Hannibal finishes setting the board. Will plays white, as usual. He moves the King-front pawn forward one space to free up his Bishop and Queen.

"I just had to know," he murmurs, and clears his throat as Hannibal hums and moves his Queen-side knight over the row of pawns, towards the center. "What are the rules this time?"

"Questions, and honest answers," Hannibal replies.

Will nods. He moves his Bishop out, hoping to lure Hannibal's pawns into play. As they've aged, their styles have changed dramatically. Will remembers the first time they'd played, how Hannibal moved from aggressor to defensive and back, while Will matched him, mimicked him, perfect equals and opposites.

"If I take a piece," Will says. "I want you to touch me."

Hannibal nods, sitting forward, his elbows on his knees as he considers his next move. "Of course, darling."

The first loss is Will's, a pawn falling under Hannibal's knight. Hannibal's head tilts, his eyes sharp on Will's face. Will meets his gaze as steadily as he can. "Did you call Alana?" he asks.

Will nods, pressing his lips together.

Hannibal smiles. "How was she?"

"She cried," Will murmurs. He slides another pawn forward, cornering Hannibal's Bishop in a way that, should he take it, he will lose it to Will's Queen. "She asked me if I was still with you, when I told her I had children."

Hannibal considers this. "So," he murmurs, and takes Will's pawn. "She knows we have children."

"Yes," Will replies.

Hannibal lets out a frustrated growl. "You're reckless, my love," he says, and though the words are scolding, his tone is as mild as ever. "We have not even established her involvement and already you're opening wounds long-since scarred over."

"I have a right to know," Will replies shortly. He takes Hannibal's Bishop in his next move.

Hannibal nods, and stands. He circles the table and Will sucks in a breath, closing his eyes as Hannibal's hand flattens over his shoulder. The first time they did this – Will remembers it well – Hannibal had been chaste, teasing almost. He had come to Will slowly, as coaxing and brilliant as an anglerfish's light, until Will was trembling and soaked to the core with need for the Alpha. Now, Hannibal touches him like ownership, assured and so full of adoration. Will's bitten neck blushes and warms under Hannibal's touch, as the Alpha gently squeezes his nape, and leans down to kiss below his ear.

"Your cruelty is still so sharp," he breathes, and kisses Will again, before he withdraws and takes his seat. Will's eyes open, his lips parted as he sucks in a slow, uneven breath. His fingers curl, and he watches Hannibal's hands as the Alpha regards the board, plotting his next move.

He takes one of Will's knights with his rook. "I do not understand your fear," he murmurs. Will blinks, and frowns, meeting his eyes. "Apprehension, anger, even a sense of betrayal or outrage, I understand. But I do not know why you are afraid. Will you tell me?"

"I…" Will sighs, clears his throat, fingers flexing. Honest answers; that's the rule. "I don't know," he replies, and Hannibal's jaw clenches. "I think it's all just…combining into something like fear. What I'm feeling is – I cannot name it. But it's strong."

"Grieving for the loss of your mother?" Hannibal asks, and Will shakes his head. "Or, perhaps, there is some part of you, however small, that resents the life we have had to live. Being uprooted, and forced to constantly look over your shoulder."

Will shakes his head before Hannibal even stops speaking. "I love you," he says. Harshly. Ardently. On that point, he is absolutely certain. "And I love my children. More than life. I cannot think of a single alternate life where I would be as happy as I am now."

"Happy, yes," Hannibal concedes. "But are you engaged? I see you, pacing the walls and streets of this town. When we are hunting, or when we are in bed, you come to me as an addict in need of a fix."

Will frowns, and tries not to be offended. "You make me sound like some kind of adrenaline junkie," he snaps, and takes Hannibal's other Bishop in his next move.

Hannibal smiles, and stands again. This time, he takes Will's hands, makes them rest on his chest, and leans over Will's side. He takes Will by the neck, angles him up and kisses him deeply. Will growls, fingers tightening in Hannibal's shirt, pulling him closer as Hannibal's lips part and Will feels teeth. Hannibal's hand flexes on his throat, like a warning, so that when he pulls back, Will does not give chase.

Will whines. The hurt in his chest at hearing Alana's voice has faded, and with its absence comes the familiar heat that being with Hannibal brings him. In the presence of his Alpha, he is soothed and steadied, secure in the knowledge that all of his children are safe under their roof.

"Not a junkie, Will," Hannibal says with a smile, letting go of Will's neck and taking his seat again. "Perhaps you see Alana as a work unfinished. A loose thread."

"I don't want to kill Alana," Will says.

"Even if what we fear is true, and she intends to tear you away from me?" To his credit, Hannibal sounds more curious than anything else, but his irises are red.

"I know you wouldn't let that happen," Will replies, quiet and controlled. His hands curl, burn from Hannibal's warmth.

Hannibal smiles at him. "Did you not say just this morning that it's not always about what I can and cannot do?"

Will flinches, lowering his eyes. "I was angry," he says. "I was upset."

"Understandably so," Hannibal agrees with a nod. He slides a pawn forward, cornering Will's King.

Will huffs and moves his King one space to the side, away from the danger.

"Maybe I am restless," he murmurs. Hannibal meets his eyes when Will lifts his gaze. "It felt like a lifetime worth of trials, when I worked for Jack, but there was always something going on. Someone to catch. Something to hunt. Now -." He stops, swallowing. "Now, my children are almost all grown, and gone, and I must wait until a new one arrives, and now this…"

He shakes his head and lets out a heavy sigh. "I'm not a static creature, Hannibal," he murmurs, as Hannibal leans forward and takes Will's rook with his Queen. "I never have been."

"I know, darling," Hannibal replies. His Queen is positioned to Checkmate in less than three moves. Will sees it, as inevitable as the decision his children will make to go to America. And, in that moment, he sees no way to change that course – he can delay it, perhaps, but he's already lost. "And I never wanted you to be in such distress. I have only ever wanted to care for you, and keep you at my side."

Will smiles, warm in his chest. "I know."

He takes one of Hannibal's pawns and Hannibal stands. Will stands with him and Hannibal goes to him, cupping Will's face with both hands and drawing him into a kiss.

"Forget the game," Will breathes when their lips part. "You won."

Hannibal smiles.

"Touch me," Will whispers, clutching at Hannibal's clothes, over his flanks. "Please."

Hannibal's purr is loud, as he kisses Will again and guides him towards the bed. Will's thighs hit the edge and he sits, pushing at Hannibal's clothes to expose his belly as Hannibal prowls over him and uses his weight to press Will down. Will's legs spread, his spine growing hot and tense as Hannibal kisses him again, again, draws out another weak moan before he pulls back and allows Will to work his shirt over his head and off.

Hannibal's hands flatten on his sides, digging in, and he slides back, to his knees between Will's thighs. Will sits up, tugging at his hair and bending down for another kiss, and Hannibal's hands settle on the small of his back, over the sensitive pressure points there, and bear down.

Will whimpers into the kiss, his nails tugging sharp at Hannibal's neck. The bite mark he left on his mate's chest stands out starkly and Will's mouth waters, wanting to taste. He lets go, pushes his hands against the edge of the bed and lifts his hips when Hannibal's hands tug at

the waistband of his lounge pants, pulling them down his thighs, over his knees, and off to pool at his feet.

Hannibal stands, cups Will's thighs and pushes him onto the bed more securely, with enough room for him to crawl into place. His hands flatten gentle and wide on Will's thighs, force him to spread further, and Will trembles, growling.

Hannibal's teeth find his neck, bite down gently as Will arches his hips to rut his cock against Hannibal's bared stomach. Will is warm with impatience, his claws turning sharp on Hannibal's back and raking down.

"Don't tease me," he demands.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Hannibal says, and Will can tell he meant to say it coolly, but his voice is low, and rough, and his hands are tight on Will's thighs, just as impatient, just as needy. It's no secret that a mating bond, especially at times of high distress and after a fight, must be maintained. Theirs has always been strong, cemented in blood and bone and only grown with the presence of their children and their shared hunting habits.

Will snarls, bares his teeth, and pushes Hannibal back. He sits up and claws at his mate's remaining clothes, shoving them down without a care for the integrity of the material. Hannibal, to his credit, seems just as eager, just as ravenous as he bites at Will's neck and pushes his shirt up to knot under his arms. He grabs hold there, on Will's back, tugging tight enough that Will gasps as pressure is placed to his throat from the neckline.

When they're both bare, Will snaps his jaws at Hannibal's neck, growls at him when Hannibal's eyes flash. He smiles, wide and showing his teeth in return, and pulls Will's shirt over his head, throwing it to the floor. Will reaches for him, grabs him, and Hannibal snarls, and puts his hands on Will's hips, forcing him to the center of the bed and rolling him to his hands and knees.

Yes. Will gasps, settling on his elbows as Hannibal prowls into place behind him, fingers tight and hot on Will's hips to help him get into the proper position. Hannibal's breath is unsteady, hot on Will's neck, his erection rutting blunt against Will's slickening hole.

Will growls, arching his hips up as best he can to coax his Alpha to mount him. Hannibal snarls in answer, baring his teeth against Will's nape, and Will closes his eyes, shivering as he feels Hannibal's fingers slide through the slick between his legs, curl, and one finger pushes inside him.

"*Fuck*," Will hisses, wincing as, though he's slick, he's not as stretched and loose as he normally is when he gets to this point. Desire burns hotly in his chest, spreads down his spine like a pool of slick warmth, and he sighs, lowering his chest to the bed as Hannibal covers him, weight forcing him down.

Hannibal's teeth turn gentle, and his free hand finds Will's and laces their fingers together.

"I won't let anything happen to any of us," he says, solemn as sure as a vow. Will bites his lower lip, turns his head to see his mate, and purrs when Hannibal kisses him, though it's

chaste. "And if fate and circumstance force our hands, it will be your decision, what happens. I won't take that away from you."

Will whines, flinching when Hannibal works a second finger inside him. "I know," he murmurs. Behind his eyelids, his eyes itch and burn with gold, and he trembles as Hannibal's fingers curl down and find his prostate. His body is getting wetter now, relaxing into the familiar touch and feel of his mate covering him. He spreads his legs a little wider, lowers himself to the bed. He flexes his fingers between Hannibal's, tightens them, draws them to his neck.

Hannibal shivers, pulls his fingers out and cradles Will's throat. "I love you so much, Will."

"Show me," Will demands, too weak to use his Voice, but Hannibal reacts to the order all the same. He shudders, growling low, and Will moans when he feels Hannibal force his cockhead against his hole, pushing past the ring of tight, slick muscle, and thrusts inside.

Hannibal's slick hand flattens on Will's thigh, keeping him steady as he starts to move. It's a deep, punishing pace, an Alpha eager to re-cement their bond, work the stress and tension from Will's body, cover and soothe him so that he's purring and relaxed. Will lets it wash over him, lets Hannibal's scent and the sound of his breathing calm his stomach and settle his heart.

He works his free hand under himself, wraps his fingers around his cock and strokes tightly in rhythm with Hannibal's thrusts. When Hannibal pulls back, Will's fingers tighten and twist around the head, edging him closer and closer to the edge. He growls, turns his head and catches Hannibal's jaw in a sharp bite and Hannibal's snarl vibrates in his chest, pressed tight to Will's back.

"Harder," he demands, though there's no heat to it. Hannibal obeys, lets go of Will's hand and wraps both of his in a tight grip around Will's hips, bruise-heavy. He pulls Will back onto him, forcing himself deeper, the sounds of their bodies colliding loud and obscene. Will is wet now, soaked to the bone, sweat making the way they move together easy as anything.

Hannibal thrusts deep, sharply, and Will's breath catches at the sudden surge of pleasure as Hannibal's cockhead finds his prostate. He bows down, desperate for that again, and Hannibal growls, knowing what he's done. He rises from Will's back, fully onto his knees, and pulls Will against him, pressed deep and hips rutting to get Will to tighten up for him.

Will gasps, moaning roughly. His cock twitches and leaks onto his hand. "*Yes*," he says, low, encouraging. "Right there. Don't stop."

As if Hannibal had any intention of doing so. Will found out quickly that Hannibal likes him when he's trembling and incoherent with pleasure. Will sucks in a breath, drags the nails of his free hand over his nape and tightens his grip as he bears down. The feeling of Hannibal deep inside him, stretching him out, piercing that tender, secret place, is one he has always loved, always needed. It sates him like nothing else can.

He keeps touching himself through his orgasm, pulling each spasm and tremble of his muscles to the edge of pain as he spills over his hand and between his knees. He whimpers,

and lets go when he cannot take any more, stretches his arms in front of him and settles under his Alpha's weight.

Hannibal's growl turns into a purr, pleased and proud at Will's performance. He pulls back, fucks in again and Will whimpers, flinching at the overstimulation. But he does not protest – cannot, for now he needs Hannibal's knot, needs his Alpha to mount and fill him in the way only he can.

Hannibal's hands slide up Will's flanks, cup the sharp jut of his ribs, nails digging in. "Beautiful," he breathes, raw against Will's spine when he covers Will once more. Will closes his eyes, turns his head to listen to the sound of Hannibal as his breath stutters, catches. His hips jerk sharply, rutting to soothe the itch at the base of his cock telling him to knot and tie himself to Will.

It comes quickly, incensed by the sweetness of Will's arousal-soaked blood. Hannibal bites him harshly on the shoulder when he finishes, his knot swelling up and tying them together. Will's gut turns warm and heavy as Hannibal starts to spill inside him, and he sighs, stretching out again, and allows Hannibal to flatten him to the bed and cover him in an instinct as old as evolution.

Will is purring, no desire in him to ration his pleasure. Hannibal rumbles lowly, a bass counter-chorus, and nuzzles Will's nape, pushing his sweaty hair to one side to expose his red skin.

Will sighs, turns his head and nuzzles Hannibal's temple. "I suppose I don't have to ask," he says.

Hannibal huffs. "All our children are in wholehearted agreement that, regardless of Alana's involvement, we should go to America."

Will presses his lips together, sighs again through his nose. Hannibal shifts his weight, pressing himself more thoroughly over Will so that he can kiss his cheek and jaw. His hands slide up, finds Will's, their fingers lacing loosely. "Are you alright with that?"

"We said we'd put it to a vote," Will replies mildly.

"Yes, but we never said we'd agree to what the voting decision was," Hannibal says. Will can hear he's smiling.

He rolls his eyes. "You already won," he says. "You don't need to press it."

He shivers as Hannibal's body twitches with restrained laughter. "I apologize," he murmurs.

Will sighs, settling down to wait out Hannibal's nod. He feels drained, exhausted, and his eyelids droop. "I spoke to Morgan," he murmurs. Hannibal hums curiously. "Her son. He's her receptionist, I guess."

Hannibal is silent, then; "You want to meet him."

"I want to see her again," Will says. "I just – I never thought I'd be able to. That the possibility would even come up." He clears his throat. "It's conjuring strong emotions."

"If it's any consolation, I don't think, even now, that she blames you for what happened."

"No," Will replies, laughing. "No, she's always blamed you for what happened to me."

"Do you think – providing, of course, that this is not part of her design – that she would forgive me? If she saw how happy we were?"

"I don't know," Will murmurs. "It's strange. I remember that day so clearly, as if it happened yesterday. I remember seeing you, smelling your blood." He shivers, biting his lower lip. "If Jack had killed you…. I don't know what I would have done."

Hannibal nuzzles his neck, making him shiver again. He's smiling. "I could have never imagined that night the way it played out," he replies, soft as a prayer in a church. His voice is heavy with reverence. Will sighs, and winces when Hannibal's knot goes down, allowing them to separate. Hannibal pushes himself to his hands and knees and Will turns, and Hannibal cups his face and brings him in for a kiss. He sighs, resting their foreheads together. "With all my careful planning, all my insight, you still remained entirely unpredictable to me." He kisses Will again. "You still are."

"Well," Will replies, laughing, "I'd hate for you to get bored."

"Oh, darling, if there is one thing I have always been certain of, it's that life with you is never boring."

Will smiles, ducking his head, his cheeks darkening. He sighs, and they rise from the bed and head to the bathroom. They shower, redress, and rejoin their children. Mischa is on the couch, Shannon on her lap as Mischa braids her hair. Adam is at her feet, his laptop on the coffee table, his eyes shining with the brightness of the screen.

They look up as Hannibal and Will enter and Mischa grins at them.

Adam clears his throat. "So," he begins, and Will takes a seat in one of the comfortable chairs at his side, Hannibal at his shoulder, still standing. "I looked up that lawyer. Seems legit. And, unfortunately, so is the death."

Will nods, and Hannibal squeezes his shoulder gently.

"I couldn't find anything tracing the office back to those Verger people."

Will nods again. "I managed to speak to Alana," he says. Shannon straightens up, sliding off Mischa's lap, and the girls both fix him with a twin pair of confused frowns. "She will think, when we go, that it'll just be me."

"We should go to Baltimore first," Shannon says. "Catch her by surprise."

Will sighs, and shakes his head.

"*But*," Adam continues, "the Verger meat-packing company did just buy a huge swath of farms outside New Orleans. P.R. said it was to create jobs, and I don't know if we'll even be near there, but." He shrugs.

Will frowns. It could be a coincidence.

"We can't fly straight into Baltimore," he says. "If Alana knows to look out for me, she'll have eyes watching the arrivals for any airport near the place."

"Perhaps New York, then," Hannibal suggests. "It's a large area full of people. It would be next to impossible to pinpoint us in real time. We could fly in, drive down to Maryland and assess the situation from there."

Will sighs. He knows it's a lost battle already. The light in his children's eyes, the hunter mindset, is all-too-familiar. He turns and looks up at his mate, takes his hand and squeezes it.

"We'll need a place for Adam," he murmurs. "Just in case."

Hannibal nods. "I owned a cabin on the bay," he says. "It will be unkept, I'm sure, but it's still mine."

Will sighs, and stands. Mischa stands as well, circling the table and nuzzling into Will's side. Will slings an arm around her shoulder and kisses her forehead.

"We might be gone a while," he tells her. "How much did you bring?"

"Almost everything, honestly," Mischa replies. "Just moved up my summer packing list. So I'm set for anything we'll need."

Will smiles, proud at her preparedness. "Alright," he says, nuzzling her hair again. "Everyone, pack tonight. Your father and I will get tickets for the next flight available, and we'll head out as soon as we can."

They nod, standing and separating like a unit of soldiers told to march on. Will watches them go, unable to fight the pang of worry and pride that mix in equal measure behind his heart.

Hannibal comes to him, settles a hand on the nape of his neck and kisses his temple. "Come with me," he says, and Will nods, following mutely as Hannibal leads him to the kitchen. "We will have to make sure we eat everything perishable and make arrangements to see to the house in our absence."

"I can do that," Will says, and sits at a bar stool.

Hannibal smiles at him. "I know, darling," he says. He regards Will, and sighs, looking down and leaning against the counter. "I know this isn't what you wanted. And you are right, as always – this is an attack on my family, whether it was malicious or a result of good research from someone we will never meet again. Nevertheless, I find the idea of letting it go unanswered…uncomfortable."

Will huffs a laugh, rubbing his hands over his face. "I'll just be happy when it's over," he says.

"If things go well, I see no reason why we cannot linger," Hannibal suggests. "We might visit your uncle, and your cousins. Your stepmother, if she's still alive. I'm sure they'd be happy to see you."

Will considers that. He hasn't spoken to his family in a long, long time. He wonders if they might have heard anything about what happened to him – if rumors have spread as far as swamps, over mountains and lakes so wide and quiet that one can hear a footstep from a mile away. His family were old and traditional enough to regard Omegas as lesser, as weaker. Oh, if they could see him now.

He nods, and swallows. "Yeah," he murmurs. "Maybe."

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

hey all!
this chapter contains a visit from Doctor Greystone, and the topic covers the subject of incest. it's not condoned by the Lecters in any way and there's no graphic detail about it, but I wanted to let y'all know. feel free to message me here or on Tumblr for any further explanation!
enjoy!

Finding five tickets to New York on short notice is no easy task, and especially so finding some within the same area of the plane. In all honesty, Will hadn't expected for them to be able to all sit together, and he smiles fondly when Hannibal lets out a huff of frustration, evidently coming to the same conclusion.

He walks over, wraps his arms around Hannibal's shoulders from behind, stomach to the back of the couch, and kisses below his ear. He can see, on Adam's laptop, the seats that appear to be the only choices left. Two near the front, in business class, and three towards the wing of the plane. Two are on one side of the aisle, one on the other, just behind the wings.

Hannibal sighs, idly reaching up to cradle Will's wrists, thumb stroking over the knot of bone at the joint. "This is the most reasonable arrangement I can find," he murmurs.

Will nods, nuzzling his mate again. "You and Shannon take the front," he replies. "I'll sit with Adam and Mischa towards the back."

Hannibal frowns. Will can see the reflection of his lowered brow in the laptop's screen, and he smiles when, after another second of hesitation, Hannibal purchases the tickets. His fingers fly through putting in credit card information, as all of them make sure to memorize their numbers in case their wallets are lost or stolen. When it is done, he gets a chime on his phone that is their emailed boarding passes, and closes the laptop, setting it to one side.

"When's the flight?" Will asks, smiling when Hannibal turns his head and nudges his forehead against Will's jaw, puts his nose below the corner of it. His other hand rises, loosely curls in Will's hair, petting it back from his ear and neck.

"Tomorrow night," he replies. "Out of Manchester, and connecting through Edinburgh, then to New York. The layover is short, but Edinburgh is not too large an airport, to my recollection."

Will nods, accepting that. He pulls away from his mate, purring at Hannibal's protesting growl, and circles the couch instead, climbing into place at Hannibal's side, his heels tucked

under his thighs, knees resting against Hannibal's flank and hip. He leans over himself, sighs and settles there as Hannibal's arm wraps around his shoulders.

Will closes his eyes, letting his mate pet him as he goes through the mental checklist of his own; arranging for a gardening service to tend to the lawn and backyard while they're gone, firstly. They live in a neighborhood with a strictly-regimented HOA, which he suspects was one of the reasons Hannibal liked the place so much. It's a sense of community without community, politeness and restrictions second-nature to those living within it.

Secondly, to pack Adam a small bag that Will may take with them when and if the time comes to sequester him away. Water bottles, loose clothes, and an Alpha teething ring that Will discreetly bought a month ago. It will satisfy Adam's urge to bite since he does not have a companion to mount and mate with. Though ruts do not last long, they are savage things, and Will would be remiss if he didn't consider the possibility that Adam, with his diet and upbringing, would be worse than most Alphas.

The fact that they have the rest of this day and the next before the flight means they will easily eat all their perishable food, so he doesn't have to worry about that, especially if Hannibal keeps insisting that he overfeed Mischa. Shannon is an indulgent eater, and though Adam tends not to eat much at a time, he eats often, constantly snacking as most teenagers do. He's not worried about that.

Which only leaves actual packing, and Will is feeling lazy, content to wait until tomorrow to do that. Like this, in their living room, with his Alpha's steady breathing and heartbeat against his ear, Will feels settled, and tries not to let the anxiety surrounding this whole trip affect him.

He presses a hand to his stomach and Hannibal turns his head, seeing the action. "Are you alright?" he murmurs, his hand sliding to Will's nape and gently resting there.

Will hums, swallows. "I haven't had any morning sickness," he murmurs, instead of giving voice to any other concern. "I had it really bad with Adam."

Hannibal shifts, turns his head to kiss Will's messy hair, still damp from their shower earlier. "But not Mischa and Shannon," he says, and Will nods absently. "Perhaps you're going to give me another girl."

Will smiles, lifts his head and nuzzles the corner of Hannibal's mouth. His hand moves from his stomach to his mate's cheek, drawing him in for a chaste kiss. "Would that make you happy?" he murmurs.

"Immeasurably," Hannibal replies, smiling. His hand tightens on Will's nape, the other one reaching across to settle over Will's knee, large and warm. "Any child you give me will be loved."

Will's smile widens, and he lets out a happy purr. "Maybe I'll win the genetic lottery this time," he says, laughing. "Our children take after you a lot more in that regard."

Hannibal hums, his expression soft, eyes wandering over Will's face like an idle touch. His hand moves into Will's hair, takes a curl and wraps it around his finger. "A woman with your eyes, your curls, your smile?" he says, and huffs. "God help whoever she decides to court."

Will laughs, blushing and pleased at the praise. He cups Hannibal's face, kisses him again, and they part when they hear footsteps approaching.

"It was the last day of the fair today." It's Shannon's voice, and she and Mischa emerge from the dining room. Mischa has her hands in her sister's hair, braiding it as she walks behind her, and lets out a low, teasing laugh.

"Jealous!" she says. "Was that ride still there, that you stand in and it spins you? That's my favorite."

"Yeah," Shannon replies. She smiles at Will and Hannibal and Will moves on the couch, giving her room to sit beside him. Shannon sits, and Mischa takes a hair tie from her wrist with her teeth, finishes the braid, and plops herself unceremoniously into her sister's lap, feet digging under Will's thighs for warmth. "Jaimie threw up."

Mischa rolls her eyes, huffing, and Will smiles at her, turning so he's pressed with his back to Hannibal's side. Hannibal's hands settle on him, around his chest, under his arms and over his stomach. Will closes his eyes, feeling Hannibal nuzzle his nape, breathing deep.

"When's our flight?" Mischa asks as their legs tangle, and Shannon reaches out to settle one hand on Will's knee. They're all wonderfully tactile, his family, raised on a diet of open affection and gentle hands. Even when they spar, Hannibal and Will always made sure they cuddled together afterwards to recement their bond.

"Tomorrow evening," Hannibal tells her, his warm exhale making Will shiver. He tilts his head to one side, resting it on the back of the couch, and he feels Hannibal nuzzle the bite marks on the side of his throat. "We will not be sitting together, unfortunately, but the first flight is short, and I'm sure we will be sleeping for most of the second."

Mischa smiles. Her eyes, bright with warmth, land on Will, rake down him, to his stomach. She leans back and Shannon hugs her, nuzzling the thick waves of dark hair that fall around her shoulders.

"Will you sit with me, mama?" she asks.

Will smiles. "Of course," he replies. "I want to hear all about this boyfriend."

Mischa grins, showing her teeth. "Not much to tell," she says with a cavalier shrug. "He's cute. He's sweet. He worships me."

"As he should," Hannibal says, purring and proud.

Will rolls his eyes, nudging Hannibal gently with his elbow. "How did he react to the news that you won't be able to bring him home for the holidays?" he asks.

Mischa hums, pressing her lips together, her hands settling over Shannon's and petting her idly. "He wanted to meet you all," she replies. "But I think he was relieved. I've told him stories about you guys." She grins, off-kilter. "Intimidating ones."

Will rolls his eyes. "Mischa," he murmurs, chiding, "you can't possibly want to scare away a potential mate."

"Any mate who's scared of our family isn't worth being my mate at all," Mischa replies coolly, so much like her father that Will's heart stutters. He swallows, and Hannibal's arms around him momentarily tighten.

He must make a noise, or something shows on his face, because Mischa's expression grows solemn, and she sits forward, climbing off Shannon's lap and into Will's. She takes his face and rests their foreheads together, always careful of his stomach. Their noses brush and Will sighs, covering her hands with his.

"You don't have to worry about me, mama," she whispers. "He's wonderful, really. Even if he's not permanent."

Will, at least, manages to laugh at that. "I know," he replies, and pulls back to see her face. "Forgive me. I'm…hormonal, or something. I just want -." He clears his throat, swallows again. "I want all of you to be happy. As happy as your father and I are. That's all that matters to me."

"We are happy, mom."

That's Adam, and Will looks up to see his son circling the couch, a smile both fond and affectionate curling the corners of his mouth up. There's no room on the couch for him, but Hannibal pushes back and pulls Will along, and then Mischa, and Shannon curls up to her back so Adam has room to wedge his way in. His hand finds Will's ankle, and his forehead touches Shannon's shoulder, so they're all a mess of connections and bonding, and Will sighs, pleased and settled under the weight and warmth of his children, with his Alpha at his back.

Then, Shannon laughs, and turns her head to nip Adam's ear. "There's no *way* you're already packed," she says.

Adam huffs. "Packing is boring," he mutters. Will smiles.

"Perhaps your sisters will be willing to entertain you, then," he says, and Adam grins at him, standing and pulling both Shannon and Mischa to their feet. He lifts Mischa off Will by her stomach, wrapping his arms around her and hauling her back like she's a wayward child, and Mischa squeals with laughter, batting at his hands playfully until her feet touch the floor.

Will straightens, and stands, and Hannibal follows suit.

"It's late," Hannibal murmurs, taking Will's hand. Though the hour is hardly touching nine, the sky is dark. "Is anyone hungry?"

A chorus of soft 'No's and headshakes meets his question.

Will turns to him, nuzzles his shoulder. "I am," he murmurs, for he didn't finish dinner, and hunger is clawing at his stomach.

Hannibal smiles, and wraps an arm around his shoulders. "Alright. I want everyone to get an early night, and if you need either of us, we will be in the kitchen. Goodnight."

"Night, papa," Mischa says, and throws herself into a hug around both Will and Hannibal. Will huffs, grinning when her skinny arms tighten around their shoulders, and then she withdraws. Shannon and Adam are more reserved with their affection, waiting until Will withdraws to hug Hannibal first, receiving kisses to the tops of their heads, and then Will.

Then, they leave, towards Adam's room, and Hannibal takes Will's hand again and brings it to his lips.

"Come with me, my love," he murmurs, and Will smiles, and nods. "I'll feed you."

Hannibal has Will's leftover dinner plated and sitting in the microwave, and he warms it while Will sits at a bar stool, idly wringing his fingers through each other. He stares down at them, contemplative and quiet, and startles when Hannibal sets his food in front of him, along with a fork, and ice water.

"Something on your mind?" he murmurs to Will's hair, kissing him there once, before he takes a seat at Will's side. He asks like he already knows the answer.

Will smiles, and starts to eat. He really is hungry, and needs the time to quiet and center his thoughts before he speaks them. Hannibal has the ability to dissect and construct motivations past Will's conscious ability, and so he must make sure he's aware of any possible question and answer before he speaks.

When his meal is half-done, he settles with a sigh, and takes a drink. He looks to his mate, finds Hannibal watching him from the corner of his eye, unmoving. There's no food or drink in front of him.

"Have you ever considered it?" he murmurs. Hannibal's eyebrows rise, and their gazes lock. "Going back?"

Hannibal blinks at him, his smile faint. "To Italy?" he asks.

Will rolls his eyes, spears another bite of meat and eats it. "Don't be coy."

Hannibal huffs, a quiet sound full of amusement. "Many times," he replies, honestly. Will, despite himself, is surprised by that. "I quite enjoyed my time in Baltimore, though I often wonder if it's because it brought me to you, that my experience is so positive."

Will smiles down at his meal, blushing. "I just keep thinking to myself…. We could have stayed." He swallows, and looks to Hannibal. "I didn't have to include Alana in all this. Even

now, I don't know why I brought her to your house that night."

"To bear witness?" Hannibal suggests. "To see not only what you were, but what you were capable of?"

Will's eyes flash to him again, and he takes another drink. "To impress her?" he asks, challenging and thinking back to so many years ago, when they'd discussed this very thing; Alana could not intimidate him, but she could not have impressed him either. She 'lacks the chemistry'. "I think we both established early on that she and I would not have made each other happy." He sighs. "Still, I don't know why. I still don't know why."

"It is always a scary thing, to face true consequence," Hannibal says, spearing the heart of the matter in the succinct way he always does. Will swallows, and looks away. "Your designs have left this door open for us. Is that what you're afraid of?"

"No," Will replies firmly, shaking his head. "I know we can handle Alana, should it come to that." He breathes in, swallows. "I just…. I always thought it would have happened sooner. That we would have faced consequences sooner. Now, it's been so long, so much has changed."

He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him, and when he looks to the Alpha, Hannibal drops his gaze to Will's neck, then his chest, then his stomach. Something seems to pass behind his eyes, some understanding that Will doesn't know the origin of, and then he smiles.

"You don't want to share our family," he murmurs. "This little niche we have carved out for ourselves, in the world, is one of our own making, free from the influences and designs of anyone else."

Will wants to flinch, wants to cover his stomach or his neck. All of those things are an admission of guilt, a truth low-lying in shallow water that, he thinks, he can just see the eyes of, now. The ridges of its back, ready to lunge for him.

"Is that so wrong?" he whispers.

"No, darling," Hannibal replies, and reaches out to settle his hand on Will's thigh. Will swallows and looks to him again. "Not wrong at all. You spent so long bucking on the tides and currents of everyone else in your life." He tilts his head. "Perhaps this restlessness I've seen in you stems not from boredom, as I once thought, but from a pre-emptive fight against that kind of control again."

Will does flinch, then, for he cannot deny it. With Hannibal, Will is free, blissfully able to move within the world as he sees fit. He does not ask Hannibal for permission, does not wait for his cues and control except in the early days when Will was still honing his own prowess as a hunter. Now, Will is fully capable of acting as any free man, and it is only love and loyalty to his family that keeps him tethered, well-anchored in the harbor and away from the storms and whims of others.

"I wish I could have alcohol right now," he murmurs, instead of any of that, because he knows Hannibal understands.

Hannibal smiles, squeezing his thigh, and pulls his touch away. "I'll ask you this, then," he says, and Will straightens, attentive; "If all we fear and dread does not come to pass – if Alana still loves you, enough to forgive me for what I have done, enough to forgive you, and welcomes our family into hers with open arms, do you want to go?"

Will's eyes widen, and he looks to his mate. "What?" he gasps.

"We could return to America," Hannibal says. "Permanently. Adam's GSCE's count as a high school diploma, and he would be able to attend college there if he so chose. Similarly, Shannon and Mischa could live with us there and continue their education. There are fine schools in Maryland, and Virginia, and we have enough money to facilitate whatever it is they desire."

Will sets his fork down, his fingers trembling. To return to America? Will had never entertained it as a possibility. Of course, he'd never thought he'd hear or speak of Alana again, and yet here they are. He wonders if the Ripper legend would resurface, if the long hiatus would mean a whole new generation of agents who knew not the legend, the tableaus, the artistry. If they'd even make the connection, with Jack dead and Will disappeared.

He clears his throat and takes a drink of water to buy himself time to think, but his mind does not stop racing, and neither does his heart; both combine in a rush of blood and emotion, blocking out sound, clouding his eyes.

He swallows, sets his eyes on the condensation on the glass, the melting ice, and spins it around slowly. "I don't know," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles, and takes Will's hand, turns it and rubs the beading water droplets away with his thumb before he kisses Will's fingers. "We could buy land, there," he murmurs. "Or remain at the cabin. There's a lot of space." He pauses, considering. "You could have dogs again. Our newest child could grow up knowing the scent of the ocean, the wildness of the woods."

Will's fingers curl, his eyes wet though he tries to blink them back. "You'd do all of this, if I asked?" he breathes, for he cannot deny how enticing the offer is. If Hannibal speaks the truth into existence, and Alana loves them both enough to accept what they have done, and Will could return to the country that housed and homed him through his youth?

He wants it. It is a fissuring hope, growing claws and cracks in his lungs.

But Hannibal smiles, his eyes soft and full of adoration as he kisses Will's palm. "For you, mylimasis, I would do anything."

Beloved.

Will's breath hitches, and he cups Hannibal's face and pulls him in for a kiss. It's a desperate, passionate kiss, and Will hopes Hannibal can taste his thanks, breathe in his gratitude and his love. Hannibal is purring, the sound as gentle and adoring as the rest of him, and Will's heart stutters, stills, as he pulls away.

"It's a big 'If'," he murmurs.

"And a conversation for another, more appropriate time," Hannibal replies gently. "But the offer is there. When we know for certain how we will be received, you can make it, fully informed."

Will smiles. "Just me?" he murmurs.

Hannibal returns it, and nods. When he speaks, he's firm, soft, and Will doesn't doubt him for a moment; "Just you, Will."

The next morning sees a veritable feast at their table, all the perishable food served in a hefty offering of salad, sweet meats, prosciutto, and a roast, coupled with potatoes, diced and fried with onions and spinach, and asparagus stalks steamed in butter and seasoned with chilis and bell peppers. Between the five of them they manage to eat heartily, and Hannibal leaves the meal in easy-to-reheat containers for the remainder of the day.

"Will," he says, catching Will's attention from where he's packing his carryon. He's holding a pamphlet in his hand and smiles when Will meets his eyes. "Did you still want to go to Doctor Greystone's lecture? It's an early one, and we should be back in plenty of time to make it to the airport."

Will raises an eyebrow, taking the pamphlet. "'Abnormal Omega Dynamics in the Household'," he reads, other brow lifting to join the first. He turns the page to see a picture of Greystone, her smile wide and pleased, her hair tied up in a severe-looking bun. Not how Will imagined her at all. "Damn. This should be entertaining."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, and tilts his head when Will looks at him. "Would you like to go? We need to leave now, if we're to catch it."

"Sure," Will replies, closing his suitcase. He follows Hannibal out and Hannibal calls for their children. "Are you guys all packed and ready?" he asks, once they emerge.

Adam nods, looking somewhat sheepish when Shannon fixes him with a mischievous grin. "Slowpoke here finally stopped texting his girlfriend and we managed," she says with a teasing nudge. Adam flushes a deep red, and Will smiles at him.

"She's not my *girlfriend*," Adam argues, rolling his eyes.

"*Yet*," Mischa sing-songs. "If she's half as smitten as you are, I predict wedding bells and babies before the end of next year."

Will's stomach clenches, and he sighs, shaking it off. "Please," Hannibal says for him, "at least finish school."

Adam rolls his eyes, folding his arms across his chest. "I *know*, dad," he huffs, and Hannibal smiles at him.

"Your father and I wanted to attend a lecture," Will says. "It's from a Doctor Greystone. She's a keen study of Alpha and Omega evolutionary mating practices. It's…insightful," he says, trying for the right word. For he cannot deny, as ridiculous as it is for a woman to assert herself as an authority on his breed with no practical understanding, that she was right about one thing;

For every Alpha, there is a perfectly-designed Omega counterpart. An equal and opposite. After all, Will found Hannibal.

"Ugh, *Greystone*," Mischa says, rolling her eyes. "One of my professors had such a hard-on for her. We had to read like every essay she ever wrote, and her books, and talk for hours about her theories and stuff."

Will huffs, internally pleased at his daughter's attitude towards it. "It'll be entertaining, to say the least," he says. "You guys wanna go?"

"Yes," Adam replies immediately. "If I have to see Shannon roll her eyes after I fold one more shirt I'm gonna have to kill her."

"You can try, short-stop," Shannon says, grinning. Even though Adam is taller than her, now, she has called him that since his youth, and Will doesn't imagine she intends to stop any time soon.

Hannibal laughs, drawing their attention. "Excellent. Everyone gather your things and go to the car."

"I don't have to sit in the trunk, do I?" Adam asks as he follows Will and Hannibal to the garage. The girls grab their bags, slinging them over their shoulders.

Shannon and Mischa laugh, their eyes bright. "Oh, *please*," Mischa says. "Please make him sit in the trunk."

"Another time, maybe," Will replies, laughing at Adam's fake-horrified expression. They all pile into the car, windows rolled down to combat the oppressive heat, and the garage door opens as soft violin music fills the car. They all settle – thankfully his children were never siblings who argued about sharing space – and drive away.

"It is important to note that Omegas are pack creatures. When robbed of a significant source of influence, they are prone to acting out, and can show very Alpha-like characteristics in the wake of a tragic loss, be it a death, a break-up, or when a child moves out of the home."

The lecture hall at York University is small, and intimate. Clearly Doctor Greystone is not as popular or sought-after as she once was. She stands like a town crier at the front of the hall,

projecting too loudly into the microphone on the podium, so that every now and again there is a crackle or whine of protest from the machinery.

Will and Mischa huff at the same time, and Mischa crosses one leg over the other, arms folded. "Just wait," she side-whispers to Shannon, who sits on her other side. Hannibal is on Will's left, and Adam beyond. Keeping their Omega enclosed and protected, instinctively. "Next she's gonna tell us that Omegas always want to mate with their children."

Will raises an eyebrow, looking to her. She grimaces and rolls her eyes, huffing again. "It's one of her lesser-known papers," she tells him. "Frigging Freud and Oedipal complexes as far as the eye can see." Her tone is soft, so she cannot be overheard, but thick and heavy with derision. Will is glad she's here, for while Hannibal is surely also full of disbelief, he does not allow himself to show it, and his face is politely and carefully blank.

Still, he smiles. "I'm glad you're here," he murmurs. "I don't think I could bear this alone."

She grins at him, and nuzzles his shoulder, before they turn their attention back to Greystone.

"Such Alpha-driven instincts have manifested, in several cases, in Omegas attaching their bonding instincts to their children," Greystone continues. Will winces, and feels Hannibal tense, a near-inaudible growl in his chest. "This creates what I call a maternal-central dynamic, where an Alpha child becomes the sole bearer of the household facilities. Unfortunately, due to the conflicting levels of hormones, needs, and instincts in such pairs, they often end badly. Either the Alpha child kills their mother, or a relationship is created that is abusive and damaging to the individuals involved. This is especially the case where the Omega has borne multiple children, as they tend to fall to the wayside, neglected, or can become targets of a young Alpha's dominant nature."

Will puts a hand to his stomach, uncomfortably aware that, while the small hall is full, he appears to be the only Omega within it. It feels like there are eyes on him, and he swallows and rests his cheek on Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal turns his head, squeezes Will's thigh and kisses his hair. "Would you like to leave?"

Will shakes his head, sighing. He ate too much that morning and feels heavy and borderline nauseous from the topic of the lecture. Doctor Greystone has been wildly swinging from aggravating topic after topic – enough that it's stopped being funny. Will can tell she truly believes this to be the norm, and is repulsed by the idea of, should he lose Hannibal for any reason, he would choose instead to mate with his *son*.

A hand rises in the front of the hall. It's a female, young, no older than college-age. Greystone smiles and points to her. "Yes?"

"Would the presence of a mating bite and previous scent-marks not repulse an Alpha child from mating with their parent?" she asks, and Will wants to growl. Why, he wonders, do they always assume the Omegas are so desperate for love, for attention, that they would enter into such abuse? Why never the Alphas?

Of course, Alphas are perfect. They're 'gifted', or 'special'. Will tries to think of a single lecture or paper topic that covered Alphas losing their Omegas and reacting this way, and can think of none. But he's sure it happens. Hell, he can think of several Alphas off the top of his head that were borderline-mated to their children and, in that mix of love and misplaced affection, turned violent.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs, for one.

Greystone smiles, saccharine and wide. "The process is not immediate," she says with an understanding nod, like this is a reasonable question. "First, the Omega must lose their Voice. In heights of passion, its use would surely adversely affect the Alpha child and cause displacement. Then, the mating scar will fade, since the Alpha is not there to constantly upkeep it. Then, the scent changes, and it is at this point that an Omega will begin to feel the breeding urge again."

Will might be sick. "Can we go?" he mutters.

Hannibal nods, his expression dark and displeased. They're sitting at the back of the hall, where the lights are dim, and they all stand and file out. Apparently, his children are just as annoyed at the topic, for when they emerge into the daylight, Shannon shakes herself off visibly.

"I need a shower," she declares.

Will nods. He can't say he doesn't feel the same.

"Where does she get off saying stuff like that?" Shannon continues, looping her arm in Mischa's as they head towards the car. "Like that *ever* happens."

Adam is quiet, contemplative at Will's side. Will nudges him and Adam looks up, as though startled, his eyes wide, and he stumbles as he almost collides with a bollard, and flushes, falling back into step as he recovers.

"Are you alright?"

Adam nods, upper lip curling back. But he still looks unsure, wary.

He clears his throat.

"That won't happen, right?" he murmurs. "When I go into rut?"

Will blinks at him, and shakes his head. He understands, dimly, why Adam is concerned, and though he wants to reach out and touch his son, he's not sure it would be received well. The notion is an uncomfortable one. "No," he replies firmly.

"Of course not," Hannibal adds. "Sexual attraction between a mother and child requires a lot of extenuating circumstances, and a deviance that is not yet fully understood to be lectured on with such certainty." He looks to Adam, and smiles. "We are deviants, yes, but not that kind."

That, at least, makes Adam smile.

"We could eat her," Mischa says idly, as they approach the car, and the girls part, for Adam always sits between them. "Rid the world of her nuisance once and for all."

An intriguing idea. Hannibal laughs. "I don't think she'd taste very good," he replies, opening the door for Will and then skirting the front of the car. He speaks again once they're all inside; "Could you smell her?"

Adam hums, wrinkling his nose. "She smelled…bitter."

"Although I don't want to commit to stereotypes, perhaps our Doctor Greystone is embittered by one too many rejections from an Alpha and Omega," Hannibal finishes, smiling Will's way. Will returns it. "It could explain why she's so insistent on the idea that they are only meant for each other."

"If *anyone* touched one of my kids like that, I'd kick their ass to Hell and back," Shannon says.

Will hums, taking Hannibal's hand once the car is started and put into drive. "Me too."

Mischa rolls her eyes. "Honestly, you guys say stuff like that and you don't want my boyfriend to be intimidated by you? Come *on*."

Will laughs. The tension in the car is dispelled under the soft concert music and their laughter, and the conversation is replaced by checking everyone has packed what they need, and the house will be in order for the time they're gone.

They make it to the airport and onto the first plane with little fuss. Hannibal was right – the trip from Manchester to Edinburgh is short, barely time for the plane to reach cruising altitude before its nose dips down. Their layover is passed navigating the airport and trying to persuade Shannon not to buy every unhealthy snack she sees.

Then, the main flight, from Edinburgh to New York. Though Will senses Hannibal wants to protest their separation, he doesn't, and sits in the front of the plane with Shannon while Will, Mischa, and Adam move to the back. They manage to trade seats with the third in the row, so that they can all sit in the line. Adam has the window seat, then Mischa, then Will taking the aisle.

Mischa stifles a yawn, grabbing her thin pillow and pushing it against Adam's shoulder. "Get comfy," she tells him. "I'm gonna pass the Hell out and sleep the whole time."

Adam rolls his eyes, but smiles, already cueing up a movie from the screens at the back of the seat in front of him. Will settles with a sigh, one hand on Mischa's arm, the other tucked idly against his stomach underneath the little blanket provided.

The plane fills, taxis, takes off, and Will looks past his children to the window, watches the nighttime expanse of Edinburgh fade below them. The Royal Mile, the gleaming castle and

the Parliament building at the other end. Then the plane lists, turns and robs him of the lights, thrusts them over the Atlantic, and he closes his eyes, head tucked to Mischa's shoulder, and tries for sleep. It seems like it takes all his faculties not to worry, but he attempts it, unwilling to stink up the plane with the scent of his distress, for Hannibal will surely smell it, as attuned to Will as he is.

The captain turns off the seatbelt sign. Will is asleep before he finishes telling them about the in-flight breakfast that will be offered, come the morning.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

sorry this chapter took a while! Enjoy a lot of domestic cuteness before the shit goes down :D

About two hours into the flight, almost everyone is asleep within the plane. Somewhere behind him, a man is snoring loudly. A child yawns and gives a little shriek as it experiences a single moment of wakefulness before falling back under into dreamland.

Will remains awake, staring ahead of him as he watches the little cartoon plane make its way steadily over the yellow arc marking their trail. He wonders, absently, if it's an accurate projection, or just a cute little cartoon someone made up one day. It would make sense, to take the most linear path, but do they ever twist around beds of clouds, or change their course to go a little North, a little South? Is the air kinder over Newfoundland, or perhaps it's easier to see when over the ocean?

His thoughts are interrupted as he sees Shannon emerge from the shadows at the front of the plane. The lighting is low enough, Will's screen bright enough, that his eyes don't focus on her for some time. He frowns in concern when she smiles at him and kneels down, putting her folded arms on his armrest and looking up at him.

"Something wrong?" he asks, keeping his voice low so as not to rouse Mischa and Adam. Adam stopped pretending to watch movies a while ago, and has fallen asleep, his headphones in and listening to music on his phone, side of his face pressed to his sister's forehead, their shared armrest pushed up so they can curl up more comfortably together.

Shannon presses her lips together. "Papa asked me if you'd be willing to switch for a while," she says. Will frowns, but before he can speak, she adds; "I wanna be with Mischa."

He sighs, rubbing his hands over his face, and unbuckles his seatbelt. He balls up the little blanket and hands it to her, and she takes it with a smile, pressing her nose to it as he carefully navigates past her. He kisses the top of her head when she nuzzles him, and waits until she settles, lifting the armrest and curling up to her sister's flank, before he moves down the plane, towards the front.

He spots Hannibal immediately – not just by the Alpha's light hair, visible as he sits taller than most of the others in the place – but because he is turned in his seat, looking back down the aisle with an expression openly eager. Will smiles as soon as their eyes meet, and walks down the aisle, notes the differences in leg room and seat width. Though it's still an airplane, and therefore far less comfortable than a seat one might take at home, the places here look

positively luxurious. He cannot imagine what First Class looks like – was not given a glimpse of it, as when boarding the plane, those passengers turned left, and he turned right.

There are only two seats in Hannibal's row, and he stands, directing Will to get in first, before he sits on the aisle seat and crowds Will against the window, which is shut. Will huffs, finds that Shannon left her jacket here, and balls it up against his shoulder, giving him something to lean against as Hannibal presses close to him, their thighs touching, one hand settling on Will's forearm and dragging to his elbow like Hannibal cannot resist. Like he couldn't breathe until he had Will in his arms.

Will's cheeks turn pink, feeling overly-warm when Hannibal starts to purr. "Behave yourself," he murmurs, half-heartedly scolding. He feels Hannibal's smile, sees the bulge of his cheeks in the corner of his eye as Hannibal leans into him, nose to Will's cheek, nuzzles and gently nips at his jaw.

"Forgive me, darling," Hannibal replies, so soft, so low. Will's lashes flutter and he sucks in a breath, unconsciously turning his head to expose the side of his neck to his mate's kiss. "I'll confess, the thought of being away from you made me very anxious."

Will swallows. "Me, too," he replies.

Hannibal hums, nodding as though in confirmation. "I can smell it," he murmurs, and sighs. He cups Will's hands with both his own, rests his cheek on Will's shoulder and Will smiles, jaw against Hannibal's hair, lifts his hands to drag his knuckles gently down Hannibal's sharp cheekbone. Hannibal sighs. "I wish I could take your fears and anxieties from you. Hide them, so that they never bother you again."

"Fear encourages us to live," Will replies, closing his eyes again. Hannibal is a warm, steady weight on his flank, and he is unconsciously cocooned and warmed between the window of the plane and his mate's strong body. He hasn't felt the need to nest since Adam was born, but thinks it would suit him nicely now.

He smiles, remembering the one Hannibal made him – the bare bones of it, in his cabin. The one they are now returning to. The one they might never leave again, if fate and circumstance align in such a way that they find friends and forgiveness on the other side of the ocean.

He bites harshly into his bottom lip, letting out a soft whine, and Hannibal straightens, his fingers tightening around Will's. "What is it, Will?" he asks, eyes dropping to Will's stomach, very briefly, before fixing on his face again. Will shakes his head, wanting to assure his mate that it's not the baby, that he doesn't feel sick, that he's okay.

"I just -." He stops, swallows, and puts his eyes on his knees. Draws them up, heels on the edge of the seat. A stewardess walks by, only sparing them a glance to make sure they don't need anything. Most service and hospitality people are women, especially in close quarters where submission to an Alpha Voice or Omega distress signal could drastically change the fate of all those involved.

Will sucks in a breath, curls his hands around Hannibal's, and lifts his head, meets his mate's dark eyes. The corners of his mouth are lowered, tugged as though weighted, a crease of

concern Will is sure he never had before they mated forming between his brows.

He sighs, leans in to touch their noses, rest their foreheads together. "I'm okay," he murmurs. Hannibal's throat moves as he swallows and Will manages a small smile, gently resting his fingertips against his mate's collarbone. "I just…. Going back, after all this time. We haven't been there since the beginning."

Hannibal's face softens, his eyes brighten with something like curiosity. "The beginning," he murmurs. "Is that what you see your life as? Before, and after?"

Will smiles. "Before and after you, yes," he replies. Hannibal blinks, leans into Will's hand, touches his lips feather-light against Will's cheek. "You gave me freedom – freedom of choice, freedom from Jack."

Hannibal lets out a quiet, yet insistent purr, like he wants to push his pleasure into Will's chest. Will sighs, eyes closing, turns his head and brushes his nose against his mate's again as Hannibal's purr grows louder, lower.

"And in return, you have given me your love," Hannibal whispers. "A family, with whom I can share the entirety of myself, without reservation or fear."

Will smiles. "Were you ever afraid?" he asks.

Hannibal huffs, settles his hands gently over Will's, cradles them on one leg, which is bent up so he can sit sideways and keep his shin pressed to Will's hip and thigh. "I have felt fear," he murmurs. "Many, many times. But not…" He stops, takes in a short breath, lifts his eyes to meet Will's. "Not in the conventional sense. I am not afraid of pain, or death. Not even of discovery, for I have always had plans and failsafes against that."

"What, then?" Will asks. He's not sure he can even be heard over the background roar of the plane as it hurtles through the air, yet his lips move, and Hannibal's eyes drop to them, and he offers a weak, somewhat sheepish smile.

His fingers squeeze Will's. "Loss," he says. "I am afraid, above all else, of losing you. Or any of our children." He lifts Will's hand, turns it so Will's knuckles are exposed, and kisses the first one. "I was afraid, the night you hurt yourself with Jack's gun." His voice is barely audible, and Will watches, rapt, lips parted. Hannibal kisses his second knuckle. "I was afraid when you went into labor with Mischa, and the doctors took you away. It was the longest three hours of my life."

Will huffs, remembering the stink of Hannibal's anger. It had leeched into the birthing room – Alphas are not allowed in such a place, in case things go wrong. Of course, everyone had been speaking in Italian, and Hannibal hadn't been able to reveal his true identity, but Will thinks even a surgeon of Hannibal's renown would have been kept from his mate and child during such a time. It makes him smile.

"How do you think *I* felt?" he teases, hoping to erase the shadow of memory from Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal kisses his next knuckle, sucks in a breath. He doesn't answer, and there's a tremor in his free hand, a subtle arch to his shoulders and back that screams *closer, let me draw you closer*. They can't, in so public and awkward a space, but Will lowers his knees, turns and lets his legs rest over Hannibal's lap, and wraps his arm around Hannibal's shoulders, puts his heels to the armrest at the aisle. Hannibal shivers, nose tucked to Will's chest, and lets out another purr as Will pulls his hand from Hannibal's, into his hair, pets through it slowly.

Hannibal's purr grows louder, and Will smiles, giving a happy rumble of his own when Hannibal's hand flattens over his stomach, through his shirt. He thinks of their first ocean-crossed flight, to Athens, bleeding and pain-filled and yet content, with each other.

"We'll be okay," Will murmurs, with a confidence he's not sure is fake or not. He certainly feels settled, with Hannibal's touch warming him, his mate's scent sitting heavy behind his eyes. He's tired, and wants to sleep now, where it eluded him so insistently before.

Hannibal sighs, nodding. "I know, darling," he says, and lifts his head. Will is glad that most of the rest of the plane is asleep – the look in Hannibal's eyes is so intimate, so obscenely happy, Will doesn't know what to do with himself under its weight. It exposes, skins, leaves him panting with something not quite desire, not quite love – more urgent, with teeth, chasing him down.

But he smiles, and sits upright, draws his legs back so one is wrapped between Hannibal's, thigh over thigh, his ankle trapped below Hannibal's knees. He cups Hannibal's jaw and kisses him, chastely, pulls back with a sigh and readjusts Shannon's coat behind him.

"Well, if you're gonna force me to sit up here, I'm using the leg room to my advantage," he says.

Hannibal's voice is soft with amusement; "I have no idea what you mean. Shannon wanted to switch."

Will rolls his eyes, but doesn't argue. He sets his cheek against her jacket, sighs, and reaches out to take Hannibal's hand, pulling it to rest on his thigh.

"How much longer for the flight?"

"Just under five hours."

Will nods, humming in acknowledgement. "Are you going to sleep?"

"Perhaps," Hannibal replies. "I'm finding it hard to."

Will smiles, opens his eyes to half-mast. "Hard to sleep when you can't see them, isn't it?" he asks, because he knows. Both of them became terrible night owls, insomniacs, when each child was born. There were times Will had to be physically carried to bed, just for Hannibal to end up keeping watch while he napped. Once Shannon and Mischa were mobile, and were able to find them if they needed anything, Will and Hannibal were soothed enough to be able to sleep in their own bed, and then Adam had come, and the journey had repeated itself.

With this new child, Will is sure they will fall back into old habits just as easily.

"They're alright," Will murmurs, squeezing his hand. "Adam and Mischa were asleep. I'm sure Shannon is as well. They'll protect each other."

Hannibal sighs through his nose, and he nods. He lifts Will's hand for another brief kiss, lips warm and soft, before he lets Will settle. "Get some sleep."

"You, too."

They touch down in Newark airport, and Will immediately remembers how much he *hates* crowds. Italy and England could come close in the major cities, but population-wise there's just so *much*, and Americans are so pushy, too cavalier when it comes to one's own space. He grits his teeth, forces himself to push onward, behind Hannibal. Mischa's hand is on his shoulder, her other hand behind her for both Adam and Shannon to grab onto so they all stay connected as they pass through Customs, through Immigration – Italian passports, easiest to forge at the time before they moved to England, names changed, of course, "Why are you visiting?", "Death in the family". "Sorry for your loss.". Then baggage claim, a crowd of sheep-like people who stare blankly at screens and carousels.

Will never particularly enjoyed the company of other people, but after so many years living with Hannibal, with their amazing children, he cannot help view the rest of these people as… almost disappointing. Like Hannibal's cooking compared to a restaurant. Serviceable, capable, and altogether not *bad*, just…not him. Not his mate.

Will Alana, too, feel so alien? Will has no idea.

They go to the rental car place. Will isn't surprised in the slightest to find that Hannibal has already arranged for them to rent a luxury SUV. It's black, not too flashy but certainly comfortable-looking, with black leather seats, tinted windows, and more than enough room in the back for their children, and behind them, all their luggage.

"Have a great trip, Mister Stone!" the girl chirps from behind the counter, handing over the keys as they finish the paperwork. She grins, and blushes when Shannon smiles at her, ducking her head and giving a toss of her long, blonde hair.

"Mister Stone?" Will murmurs, as Mischa's eyes light up and she gives Shannon a teasing elbow, following Hannibal and Will as they leave the office and head towards the parking lot. "Really?"

Hannibal's eyes are bright with amusement, no longer holding any of the sorrow, the vulnerability he had shown Will on the plain. His adoration, his love, shine through nonetheless. "I chose identities for us that would not stand out," he murmurs. "You are Doctor Grey, and you have come up to meet me here, where I have come with my three children –

their mother died when they were young, rest her soul – to oversee an experimental treatment to cure a disease. You can pick which one."

"A doctor, huh?" Will replies, grinning. Then, he blinks, and glares at his mate. "Doctor *Grey* and Mister *Stone*? Are you serious?"

Hannibal lets out a crow of laughter, reaching out to grab Will's wrist and pull him in for a kiss. Will bats at him, grumbling in mock complaint, his cheeks flushed as they reach the car and Hannibal opens the trunk with a remote attached to the keys. Mischa and Adam pile the suitcases in the back while Shannon climbs in, helping to pull the bags forward so there's room for everything, and then settles to angle the air vents and make herself comfortable.

Hannibal slides into the driver-side, Will into shotgun. Mischa and Adam close the trunk and climb into place on either side of their sister, sandwiching her in – Adam behind Will, Mischa behind Hannibal.

"Everyone ready?" Will asks, turning to look at them as Hannibal starts the car, adjusting the seat to his liking. They grin at him. Thanks to the time difference, it is still the early hours of the morning, and the sky is very dark. "There shouldn't be much traffic this time of night, so it'll take us two, three hours tops."

There's a pause, and Mischa blinks, her eyes widening. "Three *hours*," she murmurs. "That's…that's insane! That's like the whole *day*."

Will laughs, and settles in his seat, smiling fondly Hannibal's way. "This is what happens when you raise your children in Europe," he says. "Twenty minutes feels like a long time in a car."

"It *is*," Adam argues.

Hannibal smiles. "Your mother used to commute to his job every morning, an hour, one way. An hour and a half when he would visit me," he says mildly.

Adam whistles low. "*Damn*, mom," he mutters. "You must'a been really in love or something. That's crazy."

Will smiles, absently. Behind him, he hears Mischa declare that she's going back to sleep, and soon he can see in the side-view mirror, Adam's forearm tucked between his head and the window as he sleeps, and Shannon and Mischa turn into some strange fallen-domino line against him.

"I suppose it is strange," he murmurs after a while. Hannibal tilts his head to show he's listening, but doesn't take his eyes from the road. "The fact that Jack sent me to you, of all people. There were perfectly qualified therapists in D.C., or near Quantico. But he sent me to you."

"I am where the Ripper was," Hannibal replies mildly. "Perhaps he sought to ground you in the same place that threw you so off-kilter. Wanted you to find harbor amidst his stormy seas."

Will's smile widens. "I don't think he got his wish," he replies, laughing.

Hannibal huffs – a quiet, amused sound. "Likely not."

Will falls silent, and then he swallows. He turns, making sure the children are asleep, before he settles and puts his eyes forward. "I want to stay," he whispers. Hannibal blinks, once, slowly, but still must keep his eyes on the road. His fingers flex on the steering wheel. "I haven't even seen the cabin yet, but I know – fuck, I know as soon as I do, I might just collapse where I stand. It's where we began, you and I. It's the first time I felt totally safe, totally protected even as you wielded your influence over me." Hannibal blinks again, mouth tugging down in a brief show of displeasure, but he cannot argue, and so he doesn't. "I don't want to leave it. I want to grow old with you there."

Hannibal is quiet, for a long, long while. Will lets him think – just as Will must be careful to make sure he can answer any and all questions before he says anything, Hannibal has the unfortunate tendency to skip those parts and jump straight to the conclusion. He takes his time to reach it, but when he voices things, sometimes it seems like he blows past the polite trail to get there, and Will is left floundering, forced to catch up like there's a hook in his mouth and a fishing line yanking him forward.

So, Hannibal must reach his conclusion, and then pick out the stepping stones he thinks Will might need to join him there.

Then, he nods. "If that's what you want, that is what we shall do."

Will presses his lips together. "That is…what you want as well, isn't it?"

Hannibal smiles, looks briefly his way. "My darling, I'm the one who suggested it in the first place, aren't I?"

"Yeah," Will replies, huffing. "But sometimes you just suggest things, knowing or hoping I'll reject the offer, just to say that you did offer and get Brownie points for it."

Hannibal laughs, low and warm. "Well, I assure you, the offer was genuine," he replies, but he sounds proud at Will's insight. Will rubs his hand over his mouth, rolls his shoulders, and settles for watching the overhead lights of the highway race in rhythm above them. After a moment, he reaches forward and pulls the sun visor down for both him and Hannibal.

Hannibal smiles, catches Will's hand and kisses it. "That will not stop the cameras, mylimasis."

"No," Will replies. "But the shadows will help."

By the time they reach the cabin, dawn is just touching the horizon, coloring the water a deep, deep blue, painting the sky with pinks and oranges the envy of any jewel or flower. There are gulls calling to each other, chittering rodents and small creatures in the woods,

which have overgrown to the point where they touch the flanks of the car during their approach. Hannibal pulls up the driveway and parks in front of the door.

Will sucks in a breath, kneading his thighs anxiously. It's been almost twenty years, but the memories return to him with the same clarity of a new photograph. Sitting here, nothing but a t-shirt and boxers touching his slick skin, a blanket to keep him warm and heat, that piercing, terrifying *heat* in his head, telling him to lean across the console, to touch his cheeks to Hannibal's palms, to beg 'Please, please Alpha'.

Hannibal offering him a shot of Neutral. Salvation. Starvation.

He swallows, and startles when Hannibal reaches over, gently touching his hand.

"Are you alright?" he murmurs. The children have not stirred, lost to slumber.

Will swallows, lets out a shaky laugh. "I just…" He clears his throat, looks to the side of the car, where the corner of the patio is. On it, metal chairs and a table. Around it, memory and air – Hannibal's sister's death, talk of loss, talk of children. A promise of a chase.

A challenge, the moment Will realized that Hannibal was more than a mild-mannered psychiatrist with a healthy curiosity for serial killers. The moment he asked 'When did you want me?' and was told it was when he went into rut. The series of murders that happened right after.

'I want you in my care because I want to take care of you'.

Will trembles, his breath catching, and he lets out a whine – it's harsh, and loud, and Hannibal stiffens at the sound of it. Behind him, he hears Adam stir, similarly sensitive, and Will rubs his hand over his mouth again, forces himself to stop.

"I'm okay," he promises, and wonders if he's lying. His eyes are wet, they feel itchy, burning in the same familiar way they do when he shows his gold. Hannibal cups his cheek, forces him to turn his gaze and meet his mate's eyes. They're dark, but Will thinks he might see understanding, there. Sympathy.

Though they spent comparatively little time here, Will can't think of a single place that has affected him so radically. Not his move from Louisiana to Virginia. Not his house in Wolf Trap. Not Italy, or England. *Here*, here is where he was made. Forged and shaped into the creature he is now, in the loving hands of his mate.

He sighs, closes his eyes and nuzzles the meat of Hannibal's thumb, sucks in a breath that is subtly tinged with the scent of his children's distress. He lifts his head and turns to look at them, reaches out and takes Mischa's hand.

She stifles a yawn and Adam leans forward, putting his chin to Will's shoulder, nose touching the corner of his jaw. "Are you okay, mom?" he asks, his hand resting over Will's and Mischa's.

Will nods, smiling. "I swear, I'm okay," he replies, patting their hands before he withdraws. "I haven't been here in a very long time, but this place is very special to me. I was simply overwhelmed at seeing it again."

"So you've been here before?" Shannon asks, climbing out after her sister as they all go to take out their bags, and head into the cabin. It looks exactly the same, save for a fine layer of dust covering almost everything. The air is chill outside, but musty on the inside.

Will wrinkles his nose and leaves the door open, toeing off his shoes as he begins to open the rest of the windows. The patio has layers of dead leaves on it, many winters come and gone, and he sighs. They shall have to sweep it. He opens the door to the patio, finding Shannon following him, helping him to open any window that will.

He nods. "This is where your father courted me," he says. Though he does not stumble over the word, for it is the most correct one to use, he cannot say it's the most accurate. To give what he and Hannibal shared such a plebian name is almost an insult to what it was. For what it was, was deep understanding, a connection Will doesn't think he could find in any other – a give and take, perfect equals and opposites.

Shannon's eyes widen, and she looks upon the open-plan living room with new wonder. Will's eyes fall to the couches, dusty and off-white, and he shivers, stifling a growl, and approaches one of them. Spreads his hands along the back of it, feels the leather under his touch. Remembers chasing Hannibal here. Remembers going to his hands and knees, the first time – then, before that, the first time Hannibal kissed him, covered him, and Will felt the weight and strength of a conqueror in his hands.

The times they played Chess – first, with Will so skittish and wary he'd been drunk off the placation, too touch-starved, too desperate for it to maintain his faculties. The second time, after he'd found out about the suppressants being swapped. His knuckles tighten, remembering the anger. It's so much softer, now. He cannot stay angry at Hannibal, not anymore. Love tempers it, understanding soothes.

"Shannon." Hannibal's voice draws his attention, and he looks up to see Hannibal standing with Mischa and Adam at the top of the stairs. He smiles at her and tilts his head. "Please, I need to show you and your siblings something."

Will frowns, and his breath catches when Hannibal meets his eyes, as Shannon nods and goes to him. Will's eyes drop, unable to hold eye contact when Hannibal is looking at him like that. He turns his gaze to the stairs, remembers how they'd felt under his hands and knees. Hannibal's bedroom door – their bedroom now, he supposes.

He straightens up and walks up the stairs, and comes to a stop when he sees that Hannibal has led their children to the opening of the nest room. Will sucks in a breath, and Hannibal turns his head, smiles, and offers his hand to Will.

Will rushes forward and takes it, finds his palm warm and gentle. He pulls Will to his chest and turns him, so Will's back is flush to his body.

Though he addresses the children, his teeth are at Will's ear, and Will shivers. "It is very important that you never go in this room," he tells them. "Especially you, Adam."

"What's in there?" Adam breathes.

Will swallows, reaches forward and turns the handle. "It's my nest," he says. He opens the door, finds the air heavy and golden with dust, and there are cobwebs in the corners, and the grey and blue blankets are covered under the heavy effect of time and neglect.

But he walks into it, his shoulders sagging. He touches the side of the nest with his knee, breathes in deeply, wants to collapse into it, dust and spiderwebs and all. Wants to wrap himself up in this cocoon, in this place, where everything is safe and warm.

He can feel his family's eyes on his back, and he turns, flushes at the look on Hannibal's face.

"I haven't had one of these since you were born," he murmurs, looking to Adam. He drops his gaze again, rolls his shoulders, licks his lips and wonders if the stench of his fever-sweet heat sickness still lingers in the layers of bedding. Of course not, not after so long, but maybe Hannibal could smell something like that.

"Why? Mischa asks. "A nest is a big deal, isn't it?"

Will shrugs one shoulder. Now that he thinks about it, he's not sure why he stopped after his children were born. Maybe it had something to do with wanting to be around them all the time. Before Hannibal, all he ever wanted was to be alone. After him, the thought of being alone feels like a pain worse than death.

But his nest, this room, this cabin, holds memory. And Will likes the idea of resting here, after this whole mess is done with, as his body expands and swells with his next child. Likes the thought of a room that just smells like him. It could become a nursery, when he gave birth, to soothe his newborn and surround them in golden light.

He sighs, smiling, and leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

"We must leave that room completely undisturbed," Hannibal tells them. "Only enter it with explicit permission from your mother, do you understand?"

They nod, and Adam catches Will's eyes, his own wide. Will smiles, cups his face and presses their foreheads together in a brief touch.

Adam smiles.

"Don't suppose there's any food around here, is there?" Mischa says, dismayed.

Hannibal huffs a laugh, and shakes his head. "No," he replies warmly. "That will be the first course of action, as we settle here and prepare to investigate Alana and her family. I shall go to the store, who'd like to come with me?"

"I will!" Mischa and Shannon say in unison.

Adam bites his lower lip, rubbing the back of his neck, and takes Will's hand with the other. "Can I stay?" he asks.

Will grins at him. "Sure," he replies, pleased despite himself. "We'll need to start cleaning and straightening this place into something presentable. We'll start with washing everything, and then dusting."

"Sounds good."

Adam is a person that likes routine. He likes a set task list, and the satisfaction of completing that list. Knowing this, Will tasks him first with gathering all the linens and the bedding – except from the nest room, of course – and washing them. He shows Adam the washing machine, the utility closet down the first-floor hallway. He has Adam gather his and his sisters' luggage and put them in the guest room. There is only one, they shall have to arrange between themselves who will sleep where, though Will suspects that by the end they may simply make a nest of their own, and sleep all together until Adam goes into rut, if he does while they're still at the cabin.

When that is done, Adam finds Will on the porch, sweeping away the layers of leaves and fallen twigs, out to the cliff and over it, into the water. Will smiles as he sighs, hands dug deep into the pockets of his coat, standing very close to the cliffside and staring down.

"It's beautiful out here," Adam murmurs, and looks to Will.

Will nods in agreement.

"We're far away from Baltimore. Why did dad court you out here? If you don't mind me asking."

"Not at all," Will replies gently. He runs a hand through his hair, puts both of them folded on top of the broom handle, and sighs, joining his son in looking out at the water. "I was very sick, for a time, before I met your father. He was my therapist, and after a while, it became clear that a specific method of treatment would be the best course of action to cure me. The kind that required isolation, and a neutral space."

Adam blinks, frowning. "Doesn't that violate some kind of law?" he asks. "Dating your patient?"

Will laughs. "Adam, we eat people," he replies fondly, rolling his eyes. "And your father is very hard to dissuade when he sets his mind to something."

"What was this therapy?"

Will presses his lips together, sighing again. "It's called Behavioral Therapy," he murmurs. "That's one of the names, at least. The idea is to center an Omega, or an Alpha, so that they

can reconnect with their instincts. My job put me in a mindset that was not my own, far too often. Your father sought to put me back in my own head."

"And that turned into you mating with him?" Adam asks, frowning in confusion.

Will lifts one shoulder in a shrug. "One instance created another, and another. I already respected and admired him, and to this day he is the person I trust more than anyone. I trusted him then, just as I do now." He smiles, and regards his son. "And through that trust, I was able to get better. He helped me get better, helped me understand what I wanted and what I needed. The rest kind of happened from there."

Adam nods, his expression pensive. Will tilts his head to one side. "What is it, baby?"

"I just…" He clears his throat, cheeks coloring. "They have sex ed and stuff in my school, they teach us about what it's like to have sex, to bond and mate with someone. But they never really go into the whole…courting thing." He shrugs. "I guess I just don't really know a lot about it."

"It's different for everyone," Will murmurs. "And it's different between Alphas and Omegas, Alphas and women, et cetera." He looks away, out to the cliffs again. "It's…seeking to understand. Sexual desire is fluid, it can change, and some people don't feel it at all. But courting is like…learning to play Chess."

Adam blinks at him.

"You learn all the pieces, all the moves, and you find someone to play with. If they play well, and you like playing with them, then you keep doing it until you both reach a mutual place of understanding." Will smiles faintly. "Your father and I have reached the point where we don't even need to set out the board." He clears his throat, feeling the metaphor turning clumsy, and huffs a laugh, running a hand through his hair again. "I can't really explain it, Adam, though I will try and answer questions if you have them. As an Alpha, your father might be able to offer more insight into the details."

Adam nods, accepting that. His shoulders roll, and he lifts his head, closing his eyes to feel the wind on his face. The bluffs here create a constant gale, piercing and cold.

"I like it here," he finally says, whisper-quiet. He opens his eyes and looks to Will. "Do you think we could stay here, for a while? After all's said and done?"

Will grins, wide and warm. "Of course, baby," he says, and reaches out to pull Adam into a hug, both of them seeking warmth and protection from the cold wind. Adam shivers, and they part, and go inside just as Hannibal, Shannon, and Mischa enter the house. Will closes the patio door and Mischa closes the front door, locking it.

"Dad bought bacon!" she crows, rubbing her hands together in glee.

Will grins, and lifts his head as he hears the washing machine beep, telling them the first load is done. "Adam, go change the laundry over and start a new load if there is one. Shannon, come help me dust while your sister and father prepare breakfast."

Hannibal smiles at him, and leans in for a kiss that Will eagerly grants him. He leaves the broom by the door, and leads Shannon towards the utility closet to grab dusting supplies, as Hannibal turns on the oven and Mischa unpacks the groceries.

This could be their home, if the future and fates allow it. Will purrs as he works, letting the cabin fill with the scents of his family, and the sounds of his children's happy laughter.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

so sorry for the long wait and the short-ish chapter! hope you guys like it <3

Jetlag sees their eyes drooping by seven at night, and Hannibal and Will clear their dinner as their children go to bed, hand in hand, Mischa leading Shannon leading Adam up to their room after they each receive gentle hugs goodnight. Will watches them go, smiling, and helps Hannibal with the dishes. Hannibal checks the perimeter, sealing and locking all windows and doors, and Will goes up to their children's room.

They're all totally passed out, and just as he suspected – piled atop each other on mattresses and sheets and blankets, the frames of the beds tilted up and pushed flat to the wall to make space. Mischa is the head of the pack, as always, sprawled out on her side with her fingers in Shannon's hair, Shannon's head resting on her flat stomach. Shannon lays at an off-angle, back to her sister's thighs, and Adam in a curled-up ball, kitten-like, in front of her, the back of his shoulder providing a pillow for Mischa's head, his legs slotted and entwined with Shannon's, and Mischa's other hand curled between both his own, their fingers laced. They look like nesting pups, pillows and blankets piled up thickly around them, and Will's heart might break from love at the sight.

He turns his head, sensing his mate, and angles his cheek up for a kiss, smiling when Hannibal rests his jaw to Will's cheek, watching their children for a moment. His arms find Will, wrap around him, pulling him close, and Will sighs, and closes the door.

They go to Hannibal's bedroom, and Will smiles as he sees that, thanks to their efforts to dust and launder, everything appears exactly as he remembers it. The sheets are black and red, the curtains heavy to block out sunlight – Alpha colors, yet they soothe him as much as his nest might.

They dress for bed, brush teeth and wash faces, and Hannibal settles behind him, his back to Will's chest, pressed close under the blankets. Will shivers as Hannibal nuzzles his nape, flattens one hand on Will's stomach, the other arm acting as a pillow and stretching out, Will's cheek on his bicep, and Will laces their fingers together, sighing happily.

"Adam wants to stay here, too," he says. Hannibal gives a soft hum of acknowledgement, tired but attentive. "I don't want to hope, but -."

"Hope is a powerful motivator," Hannibal murmurs when Will falls silent. His hand dips, under Will's shirt, finds smooth skin and flattens there again, where Will is due to swell soon. If previous pregnancies are any indication. Hannibal's thumb smooths along one old, whited-out stretch mark and Will shifts, pressing back to his mate with another sigh.

Will smiles, closing his eyes as Hannibal nuzzles his nape again. After so many years, as attuned to Hannibal as he has always been, he can smell Hannibal's scent thickening, feel the tension in his stomach and the subtle press of his hips against Will, seeking eagerness, seeking consent. Will shifts his weight again, pushes back, flattens his palms on either side of Hannibal's free hand and bows forward, baring his neck.

Hannibal growls, low and promising, runs his fingers softly over Will's belly and to his hip, curls, tightens. "This place affects you too," Will whispers, and receives a low noise in agreement. He opens his eyes, turns his head, seeking Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal kisses him, but tenses and stops him when Will makes to roll over.

"Just like this, mano meile," he whispers. *My love.* Will smiles, sucking in a slow breath as he turns and settles on his side. Hannibal's hips press to him again, cock hardening, sensing Will's surrender. He bites at Will's neck, gently, but with sharp teeth.

Will shivers. "Is this how you would have taken me, if I'd have accepted you when I first went into heat?" he asks, as Hannibal drags his hand down, finds the pocket of Will's lounge pants, uses it to tug and bare Will's flesh. Hannibal lets the waistband stop just below the curve where his thigh begins, slides his fingers between Will's legs, finding him warm and wet.

Hannibal lets out a hoarse, rough noise. "No," he whispers. Will trembles, stifling a whine against Hannibal's bicep as Hannibal sinks a finger inside. His gut clenches, the slow-burn of arousal flickering like dying embers when given new air. "Though I have always been enamored by you, I did not love you, then. I fear I would have treated you very savagely."

Will huffs. "I think I would have liked it," he replies, thinking of the first time Hannibal touched him like this – his calm, controlling voice, the hand on Will's neck, the way Hannibal had ordered him bare and stripped, on his hands and knees on the couch, an empty vessel to be filled at Hannibal's whim.

Hannibal shivers, adding another finger. Will rolls his hips, breath hitching, eyes closing when he hears Hannibal snarl. He drags his nails up Hannibal's arm, pulls his hand close so it wraps around Will's chest. Hannibal's fingers dig into his bicep, holding him tight as he stretches Will open.

"Tell me how you would have done it."

Hannibal growls, edges his teeth to Will's neck, over the rush of his pulse. "It would have been rough," he says, curling his fingers inside Will, gathering his slick. The sounds of his fingers, the wet slide of his hand between Will's legs, is gentle, muffled by the blankets. Will's mouth is dry, wanting to taste. He lifts Hannibal's hand from his arm, to his mouth, licks his palm and groans when Hannibal pushes his hand to Will's cock, stroking loosely. "I would have mounted you, on your hands and knees. Forced you to your belly to take everything I wanted to give you."

"You did that anyway," Will says, smiling.

Hannibal laughs. "Yes," he replies. "But I would have kept you collared, restrained. I would have taken full advantage of your instincts and your needs." He pulls his fingers out, pushes his own clothes away and Will whines at the feeling of Hannibal's bare cock rutting against his back. "Denied you your Voice." He tightens his hand on Will's hip, holds him still. Will shivers, trembles, and relaxes as Hannibal ruts against him, cockhead finding his slick hole, and pushing inside. He slides into Will in one smooth thrust, other hand tight on Will's cock, stroking, to keep him still, keep him pinned.

His hand moves from Will's hip, to his chest, holding him fast as Hannibal starts to thrust. Will can feel it behind his teeth, on his dry tongue.

"Your agency mattered more to me than I thought," Hannibal says, growls it to his ear. Will shivers, turns his head and nips at Hannibal's jaw. "When I knew I wanted you, I made all sorts of grand plans, contingencies, fail-safes. I knew it could go wrong."

He turns his head, kisses Will deeply.

"I knew I might lose. Lose you."

Will shivers, tightening up around his mate. Hannibal growls, bares his teeth at Will's neck and licks over the old bite mark there.

"Even though I manipulated your body, your mind was still beyond my control. And in it, I found adoration. I found love." He thrusts deep, growling, eyes clenched tightly shut. "I found my equal."

Will smiles, cups Hannibal's cheek and turns his head for a kiss. Hannibal is shaking for him, just as affected – the sea and the forest and this cabin, this place, is etched so deeply into both of them. It's a wonder, Will thinks, that either of them can breathe.

Hannibal kisses him, again, again, tightens his hand around Will's cock as Will starts to shake in earnest.

"If I could meet my former self, I would call him a fool," Hannibal breathes. Kisses, at Will's red cheek, his slack jaw. "I would tell him to love you from the start." Kisses again, at Will's neck, over his rushing pulse. "*Will*."

Will tenses up, gasps as Hannibal presses deep into him, arms tightening around him, and Hannibal snarls as his knot swells, locking them together. He spills, thick and heavy and warm, and Will trembles, whimpering as Hannibal keeps touching him, stroking him and rutting his hips to get pressure against Will's sensitive insides.

Will curls up, his gut tight and heavy, and he tilts his head back, bares his neck for Hannibal's kiss, for his teeth. He comes when Hannibal bites him, over the first mark he laid to the back of his neck, moaning loudly as Hannibal strokes him through it, smearing his fingers with Will's seed.

Will settles with a rough gasp, breathing heavily, unable to keep his eyes open. His chest is so warm, feels expansive as time and space, and he moans weakly as Hannibal wipes his hand

on the sheets and wraps his arms around Will, keeping him close while his knot keeps them tied together.

Will whimpers, turns his head, searching, and Hannibal meets him for another kiss – deep, passionate. Will's hands shake, press over Hannibal's hands, and he sighs when Hannibal parts from him. His eyes, always dark, burn with adoration, and Will hopes with all his might he sees it returned.

"I would tell myself nothing," he says, and Hannibal tilts his head. "I regret nothing you have given me, nothing that I have because of you."

Hannibal smiles, raises his eyebrows. "Even Alana?"

Will huffs, rolling his eyes. "Alana was my own fault," he says, but sobers at the mention of her. He nuzzles Hannibal's arm, settling back on his side, and sighs as Hannibal rests his nose to Will's hair, breathing in deeply.

He waits, lets their hearts slow and their bodies cool. Hannibal's knot goes down and he fixes Will's clothes, then his own, and allows Will to turn, to kiss the exposed slip of skin above the collar of his shirt, touch his nose underneath Hannibal's jaw in a move instinctively placative.

"How should we do it?"

Hannibal hums.

"You've always been better at this part," Will adds, smiling when Hannibal lets out a little self-satisfied purr.

Hannibal pauses, considering. Will lets him think, lets him come to his conclusion and carve his stepping stones for Will to follow. "She already knows where the cabin is," he says, slowly, thoughtfully. "We could invite her here, where we know the ground better. Or, suggest a neutral location, closer to Baltimore."

"I told her I'd be going to Louisiana," Will replies, just as quiet. "If I show up here, she might know something's wrong."

Hannibal's fingers curl through his hair, petting gently. "Tell me, Will, were you ever actually planning on going to your home?" he asks. Will frowns, blinks, tries to think if that's a stupid question or not. Had he? Or had he simply been too caught up in the whole prospect of *America* that his family, his childhood home, was an afterthought?

"I don't know," he replies, frown deepening.

"Adam said the lawyer's office was legitimate," Hannibal continues. "But, if we contact them, and tell them we are on our way, they may see fit to delay any issues of estate, or further their correspondence with us here instead."

Will tilts his head, considering. "My family were always very…traditional," he says, wincing. "When my mother had me, and his Alpha left, they said he was 'damaged goods' and no other

Alpha would want him. Then mocked him for marrying a female instead of taking another Alpha."

Hannibal's arms tighten and he lets out a soft, displeased noise.

"Omegas are, still, treated so cruelly," he whispers. Hannibal ducks his head, kisses Will gently on the cheek. "Do you even want to see them?"

"I was close to a few cousins of mine," Will replies with a one-shouldered shrug. "They would come with him and me when we went fishing, would go camping with us."

"Defending the Omegas," Hannibal says with a wry smile. Will wants to protest, but he must admit Hannibal is right. He remembers, dimly, his older cousin Chris – his uncle's firstborn – making him wrestle so that Will would be able to fight off an Alpha he didn't want, before Will even presented. Still remembers the muted terror he'd felt when Chris had pinned him on his hands and knees and thought that it would be his destiny, for the rest of his life, to be nothing but a plaything for Alphas. A toy, put away when it was wet, left to rot and grow fat with children.

He shivers, pressing close to Hannibal, gratified when Hannibal starts to purr – a soothing, quiet sound – and kisses his cheek again. His hand pets down Will's spine, sensing Will's distress, undoubtedly.

"I don't want to see them," Will whispers. "I want to stay here."

"Then we will," Hannibal replies, so self-assured. He nuzzles Will gently, purrs louder, smiles when Will sinks into him and tucks his forehead to Hannibal's neck. "Gone is the time when your destiny and choices were left to the whims of Alphas. I will never see them touch you again, if I can help it."

Despite himself, Will smiles. He wraps his arms around Hannibal, lets out a weak purr of his own.

"I love you," he breathes.

"And I love you, mylimasis," Hannibal replies. Will hums, closing his eyes, letting Hannibal's hand in his hair and the other stroking down his spine lull him into calm. "Sleep. Tomorrow, we will decide, and contact Alana."

"Sounds good," Will says, half-yawning. He's asleep within minutes.

Will wakes to birdsong, though no light seeps in through Hannibal's heavy curtains. He sighs, rolling to his stomach, frowns as he finds the place Hannibal should be empty. He opens his eyes, sitting up with a groan, and wipes over his face.

The room is empty, Hannibal's bathroom dark. He tilts his head, hears movement coming from downstairs – a brief jolt of laughter that sounds like Shannon. He sighs, smiling, letting himself settle at the sound of one of his children, obviously content, untroubled.

"Well," he says, to no one in particular. "Today's the day."

He rises, changes from his bedclothes which are tacky with Hannibal's seed and his own slick, dresses in sweatpants and one of Hannibal's t-shirts that still sits loosely around his neck and shoulders. He goes to the bathroom, washes his face and hands and makes sure he doesn't smell too badly like sex.

He leaves the room, finds Mischa standing on the balcony and nursing a steaming mug of what smells like hot chocolate. He smiles when he sees her, and her eyes brighten at his entrance. She straightens, nuzzling his shoulder, and dips her head so he can kiss her hair.

He hears Shannon laughing again, and looks to the lower floor, grinning as he sees her with her knee to Adam's back, holding him in an armlock as Adam growls and tries to twist out of it. Hannibal is near them, leaning against the back of the couch, arms folded across his chest. His head is tilted, he is not smiling, but his eyes are bright with mirth as he watches his children wrestle.

Will leans towards Mischa, stage-whispers; "How long has this been going on?"

"This is the third round," Mischa replies with glee, sipping her hot chocolate. "Two outta three."

So Adam won one. That's good.

Adam huffs, going limp, and knocks his free hand against the floor. Shannon lets him up immediately, pulling him into a hug and nuzzling him as Adam embraces her. Hannibal straightens, looks up when he senses Will's eyes on him. He smiles, then, soft and affectionate, and Will smiles back, takes Mischa's hand, and they both go downstairs to join the rest of their family.

"Mama!" Shannon cries, throwing herself into Will's arms. Will hugs her tightly, noses her messy hair, and smiles as Adam goes to Hannibal's side, nuzzles the older Alpha. Will can hear them both purring as Hannibal wraps an arm around Adam's slim shoulders.

"Well fought," he praises, gently, and kisses Adam's temple. "Remind me to teach you how to get out of headlocks."

"Yeah," Adam says, wincing and rubbing his neck. He glares playfully at Shannon as she and Will part. "You grab hard."

Shannon winks at him, wrapping an arm around Adam's back when Hannibal lets him go, and they all gravitate towards the kitchen. "Gotta make you all big and tough, short-stop," she says, grinning.

"Will, darling, are you hungry?" Hannibal asks lightly. "The children have already eaten."

"I'm alright," Will replies, shaking his head. He settles at one of the bar stools, biting his lower lip, remembering how it felt to sit here, before. So many years ago. His spine tenses, and he thinks, if he imagines it hard enough, he can recall how it felt to have Hannibal stand behind him. The sensation of the straight razor against his neck. The way Hannibal had touched his face, his hair, tilted him to look up like he might see God.

He meets his mate's eyes, finds them similarly dark, raking down Will's body, and Will shivers again.

"So, what's our game plan?" Mischa asks, plopping down in the next stool. Adam and Shannon flank her like spies awaiting their next assignment.

Will sighs, rubbing his hands over his face again, fingers digging into the sleep at the corners of his eyes. "I need to call Alana, I guess," he says, looking to Hannibal, seeking… something. Permission? No. Agreement? He already knows he has it. Hannibal says nothing, just watches him from the other side of the kitchen island. Waits. "She should be in Baltimore, still. I can see if she's open to meeting."

"I wanna clarify something," Adam says, and Will looks at him, finds Adam's teeth sunk to his lower lip, brow furrowed. "Alana knows about what happened the night you guys left America," he continues, and Will nods, sees Hannibal doing the same in his peripheral. "She doesn't know about the…rest, right? Our diet, the people dad killed?"

Will frowns, considering that. He looks at Hannibal. "I monitored various news outlets, after we fled," he says slowly. "There was no mention of the Ripper, either confirming or denying my link to it." He pauses. "Jack's murder, as far as I could tell, was written off as little more than a home invasion gone wrong."

Will hums, nodding. Just as he wanted it.

"So, I mean, is it possible she might…actually be okay with seeing dad again?" Adam asks, looking between them. "If we spin it right, convince her that this Jack guy really wanted to hurt you," he nods to Will, "and it was self-defense, then…"

Will sighs. "I honestly don't know how she's going to act, baby," he says gently. "She was very upset by the idea that your father 'manipulated' me. I know that's how she saw it. Time might have tempered those wounds." After all, she hadn't been particularly close to Jack, and no one could argue that she had seen how Jack's treatment of Will had affected him so negatively.

But he knows, before he even says it, that it's all or nothing. He will not leave Hannibal behind, if they go to Alana, and he will not tell him to leave, or hide, if she comes to them. They are one unit, one solid, happy family, and he wants her to see that.

Needs her to see that.

He meets Hannibal's eyes, sees understanding there; agreement.

"We will have her come to us," Hannibal says, and Will nods. "She may bring her wife, and her son, if she likes."

If it makes her feel safer.

It goes unspoken.

Will nods, and stands. "I'll call her now," he says, and goes to the front door, fishing his phone out from the pocket. Then, he goes to the patio, wishing to be in the cool air, with the salt and the sea and the cliffs. Hannibal follows him out and Will goes to the patio chairs, the cold metal table. He calls her office and settles down, the phone on speaker.

Mischa, Shannon, and Adam trickle out like hesitant kittens, wishing to follow their mother.

Morgan answers again. "Doctor Bloom's office."

Will clears his throat. "Good morning," he says, trying to force his voice to become light and chipper. "This is Tom Isaac again. Is Doctor Bloom available?"

There's a pause. Then, very quietly; "Will Lecter?"

Will freezes, looks to Hannibal with wide eyes. It's still Morgan speaking.

"This is Will, isn't it?" Morgan says. He speaks very quietly, as if afraid of being overheard, but there is…something. In his voice. Something that makes Will feel cold in a way that has nothing to do with the ocean breeze or the iron chair, long-lacking warmth. "You're my mom's friend." Morgan's voice turns light, friendly; "She's told me a lot about you."

Will swallows, sits forward. No sense denying it; "Yes," he says. "May I speak to her?"

"Of course," Morgan purrs. "It's good to hear your voice, Will." Then, that same calming elevator music fills the line.

Adam growls, fingers flexing by his side.

Before he can say anything, the music stops, and Alana's voice is frantic and happy; "Will?"

"Hey," Will murmurs, softening to her as he always has. He even smiles, and reaches for the phone, cradling it close to his mouth. "I'm sorry I ended the call so abruptly, before. How are you?"

She lets out a shaky breath, almost unheard over the rush of the waves. "I'm…I'm good. Yeah," she says, and Will hears her swallow. Her voice has gotten thick again. "Are you in Louisiana?"

"Actually, I'm in Maryland," Will murmurs. "At Hannibal's cabin. We're all here."

She is quiet for a moment. Then; "All of you?"

Will hums. "I could hardly leave my family behind, Alana," he says. "I'm sure you understand."

"Of course," Alana says, clearing her throat. "Am I on speaker?"

"Yes."

"Can they all hear me?"

Will huffs, smiling. "Yes," he says, meeting Hannibal's eyes.

"Hello!" Alana chirps. Will imagines her waving, though no one can see her. He laughs, shaking his head, chest full of fondness.

"I was hoping, if you're free, you might be able to come visit us, before we move on," he says. "You can bring Margot, and Morgan." She is silent, so he adds; "I've missed you."

She lets out a weak, choked noise. "I've missed you too," she says, like an admission. "Can you -? Can you take me off speaker?"

Will sighs, and does so, pressing the phone to his ear. His children creep closer, and Hannibal sits back, giving him space, though his eyes are fixed on Will's face.

"Alright, you're off," he says.

"Will," she says, and sounds like she's crying. Will hates that he makes her cry whenever he speaks to her – it tugs at everything that loved her, everything that called her a friend and trusted confidante. He closes his eyes, runs a hand through his hair. "I've missed you so much, I want to see you. I want you to meet my family, and meet yours, but -. If Hannibal is there…"

"Why should that stop you?" Will demands, unable to help himself speaking in a harsh tone. "Alana, it's -. Whatever you think happened, however you think it all went down, it's not like that."

"Will, I *saw* you," Alana snaps. "When you called me to unlock Jack's office door, you were a fucking *mess*, just kept repeating that you had to get to Hannibal, that you had to *save* him, and then we get there and you slaughtered Jack right in front of me! He made you do it!"

"No he *didn't*," Will hisses. His throat is thick, voice hoarse. "You don't know what happened, what really happened."

"Tell me, then," she demands.

"Jack was going to arrest him," Will says. The lies come easily, so easily – he'd forgotten what it meant to be dishonest. But in his honesty, shreds of truth remain, and so he clings to them, and says; "He thought Hannibal was the *Ripper*, Alana, come on! He was going to hurt him. He told me so himself. I had to – I had to do whatever I could to protect my mate."

She is silent.

"You're married, now," Will adds, driving the final nail home. "You have a son. Wouldn't you have done anything, wouldn't you *do* anything, to protect them, if you had to?"

"Oh, Will," she sighs. She's definitely crying now – Will breathes in the salt of the ocean breeze and thinks it smells like her tears did, that fateful night.

"Don't blame him for anything that happened," Will whispers, begs. "Please. He just defended himself, defended *me*. He would never hurt me." And that is the truth, Will knows that, down to his bones. His sincerity bleeds through, and he hears it land in her shaky exhale.

Then, she sighs. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Just promise me you'll come up here," Will says, opening his eyes and staring down at his knees. "Bring your family, meet mine. We can…we can start over. I've missed you. I want to see you again."

"I will," she promises. "When can I?"

"Today? Tomorrow?" Will laughs, relieved beyond measure. "Whenever suits."

"I'll talk to Margot, see when she's free. I'll text you when I know."

"Thank you, Alana," Will murmurs.

"I'll see you soon, Will," she replies, gentle and warm, and then Will hangs up the call. He breathes out, and sets his phone down.

Meets Hannibal's eyes, which are bright and proud. He smiles. "Still haven't lost your edge, my love."

Will grins at him.

Shannon lets out a rough breath, and when Will looks to his children, he sees them all staring at him with wide eyes. "Holy shit, mom," Adam says, quietly. "You did that so…*easily*."

Hannibal laughs, and stands. He takes Will's cold hand and brings it to his lips, before looking to their children. "Make no mistake, my dearest ones, your mother is the most dangerous animal out of all of us."

Will blushes, rolling his eyes, and gathers his phone. They all re-enter the house.

Mischa is shaking her head, smiling, disbelieving. "Was all that true?" she asks, looking to Will curiously. "The stuff you said about Jack?"

Will shrugs one shoulder. "In a way," he replies. "It's true because I made it so."

"Such is the power of Omegas," Hannibal says in playful warning, yet his scent is soaked with pride. "They change the world and convince you it has always been that way."

Will smiles, lets Hannibal draw him close and gives him a sharp nip on the shoulder. Hannibal growls, threads his hand through Will's hair, and kisses him once, chastely.

"Did she say when she'll be here?" he asks when they part.

Will shakes his head. "Said she had to talk to Margot," he replies. "She'll text me when she knows for sure."

Hannibal accepts that with a nod.

"That Morgan kid was…" Shannon frowns, looking to her siblings. "That was weird, right? He talked like he knew you."

Will nods, biting his lower lip. "If he was raised on Alana's memory of that night, he might be less than welcoming," Hannibal says. Will looks to him, and he smiles. "We can only hope he is as easily swayed as his mother."

Will swallows, nods, once, shoulders rolling. It's too late to do anything about it now – Alana knows where they are, and Will wants to make this place a home. He will not abandon it now over fears half-formed.

"I'm hungry," he says, tugging on Hannibal's shirt.

Hannibal laughs, and kisses him again. "I shall feed you," he replies softly. "Come with me."

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

enjoy it while it lasts, my loves~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No less than ten minutes after Hannibal finishes feeding him, Will empties his stomach into the kitchen sink. Thankfully there are no dishes inside it – he would feel even worse if he were to have messed up the task of washing dishes, and he's sure the smell of cleaning soap combined with vomit would have just spurned him through another ragged upheaval.

To his credit, Hannibal merely turns on the water and pulls at the hose head, rinsing the sink clean as Will gasps, braces his forearms on the edge of the sink and tries to calm his shaking. He closes his eyes as Hannibal sets the water to just off cool, wets his hand, and gently combs Will's hair back from his sweaty face. Will's jaws part, his teeth aching from the specifically acidic feeling of throwing up, burning his throat. Hannibal reattaches the hose and Will cups his hand under the water, brings it to his mouth, rinses and spits as Hannibal continues to pet his hair back, occasionally brushing Will's forehead and nape as he does it.

Will groans, aggravated. He's done this three times and it still takes him by surprise, how fucking *uncomfortable* morning sickness is. If Adam is any indication, he'll be pretty much useless for the next month or so, too lethargic to move much and too sick to stomach more than the most mundane of food.

Even as he thinks it, his stomach clenches and his shoulders roll, and he washes his mouth out again, shoves the water off and straightens. He seeks, blindly, his mate's warmth and strength, for Hannibal's scent has always soothed him, and sighs when Hannibal cradles his damp hair and lets him rest his forehead on Hannibal's shoulder.

"I can take the car and go get some stuff to help with nausea," Mischa supplies. Will winces – he can feel Hannibal nodding, but the thought of any of his children being gone, or his mate, fills him with anxious jitters.

To hide it, he presses his nose to Hannibal's neck and breathes in deeply.

It must be decided without him, because Will hears Mischa grab keys, shoes, and coats, and Shannon and Adam follow her out of the cabin and to the car. Will's fingers flex. It's good they're all going together, but it means they're all going to be *gone*, and Will winces, stifling a whine.

Hannibal smiles, and kisses Will's cheek. "Mischa knows where the store is," he says. Will knows that, she was there with Hannibal the day before. "It is not a long drive. I can't imagine they will be gone much longer than half an hour if traffic is kind."

Will nods again, and swallows, lifting his head. His chest aches, his stomach sharp from rejection of Hannibal's food – once he started getting morning sickness with Shannon and Mischa, Hannibal had changed his diet immediately so that he was at his most comfortable. With Adam, however, he'd been sick no matter what Hannibal tried to feed him.

Hannibal's eyes drop, and he cups Will's face, as though sensing his thoughts. "Maybe a boy," he murmurs. His other hand presses, flat and warm and wide, on Will's stomach. Will sucks in a breath, his lashes flutter and he leans in, until Hannibal's lips touch his forehead.

"Would that make you happy?"

Hannibal huffs a laugh, kisses his clammy skin with utmost gentleness. "You keep asking, as though my answer would ever change." He tilts his head, pulls Will close to him, neck, chest, stomach, thighs, and Will sags against him and clings back. "Any and every child you give me, I adore with everything I am."

Will shivers, sucks in a breath thick with his mate's scent, and pulls back. He licks his lips, and steps away. Hannibal's touch falls from him and Will trembles again, runs his fingertips along the edge of the kitchen counter. Touches, feather-light, the tops of the bar stools.

He lifts his gaze and meets Hannibal's eyes, finds them dark and flickering red. He smiles, lopsided. "So much happened here," he murmurs. "And yet we spent, what, just over a week under this roof?

Hannibal smiles. "One of the greatest things of life is how the entirety of it can change in an instant," he murmurs. Will shivers at the sound of his voice, flushing warmly. He ducks his head, shows his neck in a way he knows Hannibal will always react to – shows the white lines of scars and the darker bruises Hannibal puts to his throat.

Swallows, when Hannibal growls.

"You're right," he says lightly, like he doesn't know the effect he has on his mate. Like he didn't spend hours and months and years cultivating it just so, training Hannibal to react perfectly to him – just as an Omega might get slick at merely the sound of a snarl, Hannibal moves for him, shows his red, if Will even smiles a certain way.

"A near-death experience. A house fire." He looks over to Hannibal. "A gunshot."

"The pivotal moment of conquest, when a child is conceived," Hannibal replies. His eyes rake Will, up and down. "A phone call to an old friend. News of the death of a loved one. These moments shape us significantly, and you…" He stops, shakes his head. "You gave me many of those moments, here, in this place."

Will's lips twitch; a smile he tries to fight back, yet cannot. He will never be anything short of overjoyed, knowing how easily, how ardently he affects Hannibal. Hannibal tilts his head, gives Will a look so gentle and full of adoration that Will's breath catches.

"I'd like to give you more," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles, very wide. He circles the kitchen island, pets Will's damp hair and nuzzles him. They do not kiss – Will needs to brush his teeth, at the very least, and the scent of him is not the pleasant tang of sweat but the sharp, overly-sweet smell of a distressed Omega. But Will breathes Hannibal in, lets their foreheads rest, ducks his head and sighs when Hannibal embraces him.

Will's head snaps up as his phone chimes. He goes to it, sees an unknown phone number – not Alana's office, but her cell phone. He and Hannibal destroyed their old ones many, many years ago, after they fled.

"Margot, Morgan and I would love to come see you. Maybe for dinner?"

He reads it aloud to Hannibal, whose eyes brighten with anticipation. "Dinner would be lovely," he purrs, and tucks a curl behind Will's ear. Leans in, to kiss his shoulder. "Tell them seven. When the children return, I will take them hunting."

Will nods, and confirms seven with Alana. He sets his phone down and, laughing, lets Hannibal herd him up the stairs and to the bathroom. Hannibal leaves him, once he's sure Will isn't going to throw up more of his stomach acid and whatever food he managed to keep, and promises to make him something that they know he managed to stomach when he was pregnant with Shannon.

Will cleans up quickly, and when he comes out and is getting dressed, he can hear Mischa and Adam teasing each other, their voices loud. Hear Shannon's particular gait as she traipses upstairs, and the rustle of plastic bags – toiletries, he could guess.

He has a pair of jeans on and is just pulling a long-sleeved, black shirt over his head when he hears a knock at the door.

"Mom?" It's Adam's voice.

Will smiles, finishes putting his shirt on and tugs the sleeves down; they cling, fighting the wet drips still dampening his arms and shoulders. "Come on in," he calls, and drags a towel briskly over his head before he straightens and pets it back.

He freezes – a memory strikes him, suddenly, of his pack of dogs. He looks down at the towel in his hands, remembers brindle fur and short, sharp muzzles, snaggleteeth and sleek tails, soft ears. He tilts his head – moving around so much and constantly afraid of being uprooted, and with young children, Will had never suggested they get a dog. He wonders if Hannibal noticed. Wonders if, maybe, they might get one in the next few years once their youngest child is no longer so fragile.

His fingers clench, and he looks up and shrugs the thoughts off as Adam opens the door. He has a plastic bag in his hand and he gives Will a sweet, wide smile. Will tosses the towel in the hamper and approaches him, letting Adam brush his nose along Will's shoulder, scent him at his cleanest and most settled.

"We got some stuff that might help," Adam says, smiling as they pull away. Will tilts his head and takes the bag when Adam hands it to him, opening it. He huffs a quiet laugh when he

sees what's inside.

"Candy canes?" he asks. There are also peppermint Altoids, peppermint tea, and a blue box of pills. Will frowns, taking it out. It's a sleep aid, and he looks up, one eyebrow raised.

Adam shrugs one shoulder. "Mischa said she remembers you eating a lot of minty things when you were pregnant with me," he says. "It's a good place to start."

"And these?" Will asks, tilting his head.

"Well, I Googled it, and apparently this one has a really common side effect of preventing nausea," Adam says. "There were a lot of women and Omegas who swore by it."

Will smiles, putting the pills back in the bag, overwhelmed at the gesture. He pulls Adam into a hug, petting through his short hair and breathing in his scent deeply. "Thanks, baby," he murmurs, closing his eyes as Adam hugs him back. He seems so skinny, suddenly, so vulnerable and frail in Will's arms. It fills Will with the strong, almost rabid need to gather his mate and all his children, to put them in a room where they will all be safe, piled together and able to protect each other.

They pull apart and Adam smiles, gently nudging his nose to Will's temple. "Alana and her family will be here for dinner," he says, taking Adam's hand and leading him out of the bedroom. Adam nods, his brow furrowed, and they both go downstairs to find Shannon and Mischa sitting by the kitchen island, nursing glasses of water as Hannibal puts away other groceries they'd gathered. "Did you hear?" he asks the girls. "Dinner's at seven. I expect best behavior from everyone."

Mischa rolls her eyes. "We will if they will," Shannon says.

Will huffs, and nudges Mischa's shoulder with his knuckles, playfully. "Alana was a great friend to me, when I desperately needed one," he tells them. "And I truly believe she has always wanted what's best for me – we just disagreed, sometimes, on what that was."

"Well I'm *personally* very glad that you decided to mate with dad," Shannon says, grinning lopsidedly.

Will laughs.

"It may help you to know that, were it not for Alana, your mother and I would have never met," Hannibal says lightly, closing the fridge and balling up the rest of the bags to store under the sink.

Will blinks, frowning at him. "It was Jack who introduced us," he argues.

Hannibal smiles at him. "Yes, but he only did so because Alana would not psychoanalyze you, nor would she create a profile for Jack to ascertain if you were fit to go into the field." Will's head tilts. He never knew that. "Because of her reluctance to cross or erase the borders of your friendship, Jack turned to me."

Will rolls his eyes, grinning. "And you have no such qualms erasing borders."

Hannibal returns his grin, eyes bright with joy. "No," he purrs. "I do not."

Will's cheeks color, and he rubs the back of his neck and looks at Mischa. "Thanks for all the mint stuff," he tells her.

She grins at him, toothy and wide. Then, she stands, finishing her water.

"Papa," she says, her accent soft. Hannibal looks at her. "Are we going to hunt, for our new friends?"

Hannibal blinks at her, and then he smiles. Mischa is speaking in Italian, as she tends to do when they talk about hunting, trained from birth to speak in a language aside from the native, just in case. When the lived in Italy, they spoke Lithuanian – in England, either or. It warms Will's heart, makes his chest go tight with anticipation. He knows it fills Hannibal with no end of pleasure to know that his children inherited his ear for language.

Hannibal's gaze slides to their children, in turn, considering. Mischa is the only child who has hunted on her own, so they are not worried about her. Shannon has only participated in supervised hunts once or twice, and Adam has never gone.

"Would you like that?" he asks, purring the words. Adam, beside Will, straightens, his eyes wide with anticipation. His fingers flex and tighten between Will's.

"I can go, too?" Adam asks.

Hannibal smiles at him. "If you are quiet, and do exactly as you're told, and defer to me and your sisters, then yes," he replies. Will feels electric, trembling, listening to his mate plan such terrible things in such a beautiful language. He thinks he could listen to Hannibal torturing a man and would still feel this way, if he spoke this softly.

Adam nods, frantically. "I want to," he says, and lets Will go. Hannibal purrs, and reaches out to squeeze Adam's shoulder.

He eyes the clock, which hangs behind the front door. "We must move quickly," he says, switching back to English. "Time is against us. Mischa, Shannon, be sure your brother dresses appropriately. Be ready in ten minutes."

They nod, and scatter, Mischa leading Shannon leading Adam up the stairs and to their room. Will lets out a breath, and feels explosive and exposed, like the skinned and frayed wick on a piece of dynamite. He jumps when Hannibal touches him, growls when Hannibal laughs, and leans in to nose at Will's flushed neck.

"Would you like to join us, my love?" he whispers. Will's entire body shivers, and his neck and arms break out in goose bumps. He turns his head, lets Hannibal press up close to his back. Breathes in his mate's excitement and eagerly soaks up his warmth, the feel of his teeth on his nape.

He swallows, and he wants to. Oh *God* how he wants to. "Someone needs to stay here," he replies, and reaches back to draw Hannibal's arms around him. Hannibal obeys his mute

command, embraces him tightly and nudges his lips to Will's flushing neck. "And the kids got me something that will help with nausea, apparently, but it's a sleeping aid. I won't be much use to you."

"My desire for your presence has never been for the sake of use," Hannibal murmurs, and Will rolls his eyes. Hannibal huffs a laugh, and kisses his neck as they hear the sound of Mischa, Shannon, and Adam coming down the stairs.

Hannibal withdraws from him, and though Will gives a soft growl of complaint, he allows his mate to part from him and gather their children. Will smiles, and kisses Shannon at her hair, squeezes Adam's shoulder and wraps his other arm around Mischa as she tucks herself under his shoulder.

She kisses his cheek and pulls away. "See you soon, mama!" she chirps, and Hannibal herds them out the door. Will follows, and Hannibal turns just long enough to cup his chin, and bring him up for a kiss that has Will purring.

"We'll return shortly, mylimasis," Hannibal murmurs.

Will grins, and nods. Says, in Lithuanian; "I'll be waiting", and feels supremely satisfied when Hannibal blinks, and his eyes widen and flicker red, and his next inhale is very slow and deliberate.

Hannibal likes it when Will speaks other languages too.

Will manages to keep down a few slices of buttered bread, and goes to the bedroom, laughing to himself as he unpacks the candy canes – God bless the penchant to sell holiday items *way* too early, though this is the first time he's been grateful for that – and the tea and Altoids. He eyes the pills, but decides against taking them, for now. He doesn't know how long they'll knock him out for, and it's already past noon. He doesn't want to be a sleepy mess or utterly unconscious when Alana arrives.

He unwraps one of the candy canes, bites off the hook and chews it, swallowing, and idly sucks on the straight part, the plastic wrapped around his fingers, as he goes back downstairs. He puts on socks and boots and wraps himself in a thick coat, makes sure he has his phone on hand, and then goes outside.

The ocean air is chill, and bites at his exposed neck and face, and he shivers, pulling the collar up and one sleeve down to protect his wrist and most of his hand as he settles on one of the patio chairs, puts his heels on the other and makes himself get used to the cool air. He stares, out, to the dark edge where ocean meets sky, and sighs.

His other hand idly settles on his stomach, absently pets over where he will likely swell, soon. It was just over a month past conception when he told Hannibal he was pregnant, and not much time has passed since, but he'll likely start to get a little thicker in the next few

weeks. He knows from experience that Hannibal's instincts will go rabid as soon as he notices, the sudden swell of Alpha victor-scent and his desire to protect Will going into overdrive.

The thought makes him smile.

He thinks of his mother. Thinks of his stepmother. Thinks of his family – his uncle, David, and his cousin, Chris, the firstborn Alpha who had taught Will to wrestle and protect his neck. It's been so long since any of them crossed his mind, not out of a lack of love, or a lack of care, but he lurked so long in other people's heads and since Hannibal freed him, had been too blissfully happy and aware of the knowledge that he might never see his family again to think of them with any particular intent.

The tip of the candy cane grows sharp as he sucks at it, and he bites it and chews, swallowing, before he can injure his tongue or gums on the sharp point.

He thinks of Alana. He cannot imagine she looks any less beautiful, that solid and lovely presence that had kept him somewhat sane, somewhat normal, before Hannibal came along. He remembers her scent like he saw her only yesterday; she smells of warm vanilla, of cranberry scones and thick cream. Pregnancy may have changed her; motherhood may have softened her. Morgan will smell like her, and like his father. Margot, too, will smell like her wife and son. He wonders what they look like – Margot will be beautiful, of course. With long hair, he thinks. Something to pet and play with. Wide, bright eyes.

He thinks of Morgan, and though he never met Mason Verger, he hopes the boy looks more like Alana than his father. She is beautiful, and any child she bore would be lucky to inherit any of her likeness.

He pets over his stomach again, and sighs, finishing the candy cane and stuffing the wrapper in his pocket. The salt of the ocean, the brine of the sea, is a lovely counterpoint to the fullness of the mint on his tongue. He licks his lips, idly rubs at his mouth.

He takes out his phone, flipping it in his hands, and unlocks it. He pulls up the name of the lawyer's firm, but doesn't remember the name attached to the contract. He huffs, and dials the main number, holding it to his ear.

"Turner and Associates, this is Hayden speaking."

"Good afternoon," Will replies, and clears his throat. "My name is Will Lecter. I received a notice from your office regarding the recent death of Bill Graham. He was my mother."

"I'm sorry for your loss," Hayden replies. She has a young voice, something Will expected as the receptionist for a law firm, but it's clipped and professional. There's a pause, and a few clicks. "The executive administrator for your mother's will is Natasha Monroe. She's at a lunch meeting right now, but can I have her call you back once she's returned to the office?"

"Yes, thank you. I appreciate it."

"It's no trouble, Mister Lecter. Is this the best number to reach you?"

"Yes," Will says, and rubs at his mouth again. "Thank you."

"Excellent. I will have her call you back as soon as she gets in. Have a good day, Mister Lecter."

Will hangs up the call, sighing again. *Mister Lecter*. No one has ever called him that, ever. When they fled to Italy, he and Hannibal took up new names, and the only one still living who knows Hannibal's last name, and knows he and Will mated, is Alana – and her family, most likely. It points again to their involvement, somehow.

Unless.

He tilts his head.

Unless the story they spun was publicized. It was written off as a home invasion gone wrong – Will had said himself, Jack attacked the mated Omega and Hannibal, as the Alpha, defended him. That's the story he wanted Alana to tell. If she told it, it would have been registered in the police report. His mated status would have been visible to someone like a lawyer.

He frowns, rubs at his mouth again. Maybe Alana wasn't involved at all. Will's mother's death is real, after all. Maybe it's just coincidence, a bizarre twist of fate and circumstance that allowed him to come home. That might allow him to regain his dear and oldest friend.

That flicker of hope that began in his chest when Hannibal suggested they could live here gains new air, incensed by salt and sea, and burns bright. This might be *it*. This might be the beginning of the next, new rest of his life. It's a powerful, encouraging hope, and Will is in no mood to dampen it.

His phone chimes. It's Mischa.

"Adam did wonderfully! You'd be proud. We're headed home now."

Will smiles, overwhelmed with affection and love. He will have to get the details from Adam and Hannibal when they return.

He rises, and goes back inside, shrugging off his coat and hanging it by the door. There is no room in this cabin that he knows of to cleanly dissect and harvest from a body, not like Hannibal had in his home in Baltimore. Knowing this, Will searches through the storage closet, smiling when he finds large sheets of tarp like what would be laid out on wet ground for camping, and hauls it outside to the patio. He weighs it down with the chairs and table.

Then, he returns to the kitchen and pulls out all the knives and tools he could imagine Hannibal needing. Though they all hunt together, Hannibal has remained sole master of the harvest and carving. Will knows how to, and he is sure Mischa and Shannon know as well, but Adam's experience is theoretical. He wants Adam to learn; it will be good for him.

He goes upstairs and changes into dark clothes that he will not mind getting blood on, and by the time he returns, the door is open and all four of them are hauling the limp, large roll of

dead weight in a similar tarp. Will smiles when he sees that Hannibal's eyes are a dark, pleased red. Adam has blood on his hands and around his mouth, and so does Hannibal, both Alphas unable to resist the urge to bite at and tear their kills.

He nods to the patio.

Hannibal smiles at him, and leads the way to it. They set the body down outside and unroll it, and Will tilts his head, eyeing the corpse. It's a male, an Alpha – unmated, if the lack of bites on his neck are any indication.

"He cut us off in traffic," Shannon chirps, grinning.

Will huffs a laugh, and shakes his head. "Go grab the tools for your father," he tells her, and she nods, going back inside. Mischa unbuttons her coat, flushed from the physical labor of moving the body, and Will smiles when he sees the dark trail of blood staining the front of her shirt.

Adam straightens, beaming with pride, and Will nuzzles him, kissing his temple. "How was it?" he asks.

"*Incredible*," Adam replies, breathlessly. His eyes are a very dark red and Will smiles, thumbing at the smear of blood on his cheek. He brings it to his lips. Mischa joins him in weighing the corners of their tarps down like Will did with his larger one.

"I haven't hunted with a pack in so *long*," Mischa says, alight with joy, her eyes shining. Shannon returns with knives and a saw, and lays them out beside the body. "I missed you all so much."

"As you were missed, darling," Hannibal murmurs, smiling at her. He takes the saw from Shannon and lays it by his knee, as Adam kneels across from him and begins ridding the body of its bloody clothes. "We shall have to move quickly; the dish I wish to make will take some time."

The girls nod, falling into place like well-rehearsed dancers. They help Adam shed the body of clothes and Will gathers them and sets them to one side. Then, he takes his place in a chair, content to watch his family prepare the cuts.

"I called the lawyer's office," he says, watching as Hannibal begins to cut at the neck, severing the body's head. The motions of his arm are well-practiced, strong, precise, as he saws between two knots of the spine, the cartilage of the throat, and through. "They should be calling me back soon. So we can get that part figured out."

"Good," Hannibal replies, his voice somewhat mild and absent; his focus, as Will knows it often is, is on the feast.

Mischa takes up a knife of her own, pulls Shannon to her side as she grabs another blade, and they both begin slicing the thighs and calf meat from the legs. Will swallows, his stomach clenching with hunger as he watches them work.

Adam seems at a loss with what to do, merely stares, wide-eyed, at his father's and sisters' hands. His fingers twitch and curl at his thighs, and when Hannibal looks up and meets his eyes, Hannibal smiles.

He hands Adam a knife, this one shorter and curved. "Slice open the stomach," he orders. Adam takes the knife with trembling hands. "You will not want to cut too deep. If you destroy the stomach and the liver, it has a chance of ruining the rest of the meat."

Adam nods, looking at the man's exposed stomach. He presses his lips together, shifts his weight, and lays the point of the knife just up from the man's hip.

Will smiles, and shakes his head. He pushes himself from the chair and kneels behind his son, steadies his hands with his own and rests his chin on Adam's shoulder.

"Not there," he murmurs, and directs Adam's knife up to under the jut of his ribs. "Here. Feel the bone?" He presses, and Adam nods. "Follow the line of it. There you go."

Adam presses, grunting, his brow furrowing. Will laughs. "It's harder than it looks, isn't it?" he asks, knowing too-well the resistant of skin, the strange give of muscle verses organs. Adam nods. "Be gentle, but also be sure." Adam pulls the knife towards him, opening the man in a thick line down the middle of his chest. "Good. Now, cut down, towards his belly button. Not too deep."

Adam obeys, shivering when the skin parts and reveals the slick shine of the intestines, the liver. He nicks the intestines with his knife and Will wrinkles his nose at the sharp, oniony smell. But the ocean does its part, keeping the air clean as the scent of old blood and the distinct sharpness of exposed organs surrounds them.

Hannibal turns his attention to the man's shoulders, severing the arm nearest him cleanly.

"Cut below your line, now. Shorter," Will tells Adam, and he obeys, opening the man up just below his navel, through the thin line of blond pubic hair. Will smiles, kissing his shoulder, and shifts to one side. He takes the knife and sets it down. Mischa and Shannon are almost done with the legs.

"Good job," Will purrs, smiling when Adam gives a happy, pleased sound. "Now go inside, wash your hands, and bring us something to put all this in."

Adam nods, standing, and hurries in through the open door.

The organs have always been Will's favorite part.

He meets Hannibal's eyes, finds them glowing with pleasure, eager to see Will cut. Will digs his nails on either side of the flaps Adam created, pulling the skin back to reveal the bottom of the lungs, the stomach, the intestines as they bubble up and spill out. His mouth is dry and he licks his lips, growling in satisfaction. The body is still warm on the inside and he buries his cold hands within it.

Adam returns with a large, clear basin, and Mischa and Shannon pile their strips of muscle inside it before he sets it by Will. Will hauls the intestines out, lets them slop wetly into the basin. Then, the liver. Then the kidneys, which he cuts out and cradles gently. He feels a strange desire to eat them raw, to lick them dry and bite into the tender meat of them.

He shoves the need away, passes it off as a pregnancy craving, and sets them in the basin as well.

He looks to Hannibal. "Are we taking the heart, as well?"

Hannibal smiles, and shakes his head. "Not from this man," he replies, and Will nods. "Nor his lungs. This should suffice."

Will nods again, standing, and shakes his hands out. Without his coat he's very cold, but warmed within by the simple action of joining the harvest with his family. Mischa begins to wrap the body again and Shannon gathers the knives and saw as Adam hauls the basin up.

"Put that in the kitchen," Hannibal says, nodding to him. "Mischa, you know how to dispose of this correctly, I presume?"

"Of course, papa," Mischa replies, grinning. Hannibal nods, and they leave her there with her sister, and Will and Hannibal go inside to wash their hands. Hannibal sheds his coat – immaculate, of course, as always – and joins Adam in the kitchen.

Will's phone rings, and he sighs, taking it and seeing an unknown number flash across the screen. But it's a Louisiana area code.

"This is Will," he says when he answers.

"Good afternoon Mister Lecter. My name is Natasha Monroe. I'm the attorney overseeing the execution of your mother's will."

"Thank you for calling back so quickly," Will says. He nods to Hannibal, knowing he will be wanting to teach Adam how to store and prepare meat properly, and goes to the couches, settling down. "I wanted to let you know that I'm unable to go to your office and do this in person. Is there any way we can handle this remotely?"

"Of course," Natasha replies easily. "I can fax over any documentation, or email an encrypted file. The will itself is not complicated. You were left everything, and your mother had no debts. All that really remains is your Alpha taking over the title of the estate."

Will huffs, but he expected this. "Alright. I can give you an email address and have everything signed and notarized."

"Excellent. If you have any questions for me, you can respond to my email or call me at this number. I understand this is a trying time and will do my best to make this as easy as possible for you."

Will smiles, and wants to laugh. "I appreciate it," he says. He gives her Adam's email address and ends the call with a promise from her to send over the paperwork as soon as Hayden

scans it in.

He tilts his head up when he senses Hannibal behind him. Hannibal leans over the back of the couch, nuzzles Will's windswept hair and kisses his flushed cheek.

"Are you alright, my love?" he asks.

Will smiles, and tilts his head up, asking for a kiss. He reaches for Hannibal and laces their fingers together. "Yes," he replies, and he means it. He doesn't think he could be happier. Alana is coming, and she will forgive him and accept Hannibal again. Their children are comfortable here, by the sea, and they can stay, they can *stay*. "Never better."

Hannibal smiles, and kisses him again. "Good," he murmurs, brushing gentle knuckles over Will's cheek. "Rest. Relax. I'll start dinner."

Chapter End Notes

so this chapter marks the threshold - I have officially posted one million words of Hannigram fic (I've written more but hey, posting!). not too shabby for ten months, am I right? xD I'm sorry it just seems like a cool thing to me so I wanted to mention it.

Chapter 10

Will doesn't remember the last time he was this nervous. Maybe it was the day he started going into labor with Adam – he could not have explained, at the time, the overwhelming sense of dread, and uncertainty, sure that there was something wrong, that something would go wrong, when it was time for him to start pushing. He had been convinced, for most of that day, that there would be a complication, or something terrible would happen.

Adam had come out fine, screaming and pink and healthy.

Maybe before then, when Mischa had been registered for school. Will and Hannibal had settled into their new lives and identities easily, but he had been worried he'd slip up, or something would ping weirdly for their names, or her birth certificate. Someone would *know*, know they were liars, know they were fugitives. Most of Mischa's first year of life were filled with dreams, half-remembered, of Alana or Jack's ghost busting down the door and tearing them apart.

He claimed it must be a weird reaction to the prenatal vitamins he was on, since Shannon was conceived shortly after Mischa. Whether Hannibal believed him or not, he let Will lie, and the longer they continued in safety, the calmer Will became.

Maybe it was the morning before he went to Jack. The morning he told Hannibal to be savage with him. That morning, when he'd felt both reverence, confusion, and anger in Hannibal's touches; felt his teeth and knew Hannibal did not want to hurt him, but he could, oh he *could*. The day Will had held his breath and waited, waited, for Jack's eyes to sharpen on his neck and his bruised wrists, for him to ask, 'Who did that' and Will to hide his smile, show his tears, and whimper, 'Hannibal. Hannibal did this to me.'. It was Will's first real design, and the flutter of nerves he'd felt that day had been, he imagines, the same an artist might have before playing their first big concert, or displaying the piece into which they'd poured their heart and soul.

Perhaps, even, before that point. Maybe it was when he spoke with Hannibal, down by the cliffs, about the rules he would want when he went into heat, though they were few. He had known, by then, that Hannibal would be a good mate for him, that the Alpha was not only strong, and fiercely protective of Will, even then – but that there was some creature in him, something that purred under Will's gaze, that was eager to show itself to him. Hannibal's overtures to him had never been obvious, up until suggesting behavioral therapy, but once they were there, they were so *obvious*.

"I want you in my care because I want to take care of you."

So obvious.

Will cannot identify one moment in his life that has made him this sick with anticipation, for every instance he can recall in his past, everything had worked out for the best. He is no fool; he and Hannibal have had a substantial allowance of luck and good fortune, and yet even the most vast of wealth is depleted eventually. He would be the luckiest man in the world, to

have his friend and her family returned to him, have her full of just as much love and fond friendship as she had shown him twenty years ago, and yet Will cannot let himself hope, reins it in and bites it back as he sits, and stares, on the freezing patio, his eyes locked on the small slip of driveway he can see from here.

Thankfully, the rest of his family seems to understand he is going to be utterly useless to them until Alana and her family arrives. Will chews, absently, on another candy cane, a mug of peppermint tea rapidly cooling on the iron table, and he's hosing down the patio, careful to erase the scent and any stray droplets of blood and viscera from the body they'd harvested earlier.

He looks up as he shuts off the hose, wrapping it in a tight coil by the edge of the patio, and smiles when he sees Adam, tucked up tight in his thick coat, stepping outside. He has his hands in his pockets, shoulders pulled up instinctively against the wind, and his sharp eyes see Will immediately.

"Hey," Will says, closing his eyes as Adam presses close to him, nuzzling his cheek and unconsciously shielding Will from the worst of the wind. Will puts a hand in his son's hair, letting him scent Will. "Everything alright?"

Adam huffs, and pulls back. His eyes are shadowed, whiskey-brown, dark. He bites his lower lip, looks down as though nervous. "I was wondering if I could talk to you for a second," he says. "Away from dad, and everyone else."

Will's brow creases, and he nods, finishing his candy cane with a final bite. "Of course," he says. And yet, he doesn't want to give up his vantage point. He takes his cup of tea and nods towards the small walkway that wraps around the house, and leads to the front door. "Let's sit in the car, out of the wind."

Adam nods, and follows Will to the car. Will slides into the driver's side, sighing in relief. The car is not warm by any standards, but it's out of the wind, and he shivers, clutching at the dregs of warmth still in his tea, and takes a sip. Adam climbs into the passenger side, pulls his hands out and rubs them fast together.

Will lets him settle, and think. Adam is much like him and Hannibal; an internal thinker, who likes to pick his way to his conclusion first before giving his opinions voice. Will is content to sit, his eyes on the road, and sip at his tea.

"I feel weird about that hunt," Adam finally says. Will looks at him, finds Adam staring at his hands, absently picking at a fleck of dried blood from his nailbed. His eyes flash to Will, and Will tilts his head.

"Not what you expected?" Will suggests.

One of Adam's shoulders lifts. "Kind of? I guess," he replies, and huffs, straightening up and kneading his hands against his thighs. He swallows, harshly, and looks at Will as if expecting to be scolded for what he's about to say; "I don't think he deserved to die."

Will smiles. "Morality, by its very definition, is not a case of black or white, baby," he says. "I know for a fact that there are things your father takes offense to that I don't give a shit about, and vice versa, but we accommodate each other."

"Accommodate?" Adam repeats, weakly.

Will sighs, and nods. "I love hunting with your father," he says, and reaches over to smooth one hand over Adam's white knuckles. "But it's different, for you, and your sisters. You don't have the connection to him that I do, the history that I do, so it's not as special for you." Adam's brow furrows. "Even with Mischa – she has been hunting with us for several years, and had time on her own now, to hone her craft. So she has her own ways of picking out her food. You will develop your palette, in time, as well."

Adam still doesn't look convinced.

Will squeezes his hand. "I want to say something, Adam," he says, and Adam's eyes dart up, from his hands, to meet Will's. "You don't have to live this way, if you don't want to. If you don't *want* to hunt, you don't have to. My and your father's intention was never to make you into what we are; simply to give you an environment, free of judgement, but one that is safe and happy, for you to decide your own fate."

Adam swallows, and nods to himself. "I learned his name," he whispers. "While dad was driving. I took out his wallet, checked his I.D." He swallows again, his eyes bright with what Will might call shame, and his stomach aches, for of all the emotions he wants his children to feel, shame is not one of them. "I couldn't help myself."

Will lets out a soft, soothing noise. "What was his name?"

"Edwin," Adam breathes. Then he lets out a strained laugh, and rubs the hand Will isn't holding over his mouth. "He was an organ donor. He had a wife. *Kids*. I saw their picture."

Will sighs. That's what happens when Hannibal isn't given time to prepare – usually hunts take days, or weeks, for him to make sure his target won't be missed, or the circumstances are just right that their disappearance will cause the least amount of ripple effect. Will isn't worried about his disappearance being traced back to this family, he doesn't doubt Hannibal's ability to cover his tracks, but still.

"Does it trouble you more, that you had a hand in his death, or knowing about the family he left behind?"

Adam breathes out, shakily. "I just…. I think about something happening to dad. Or to you. How we'd all react to it. And I think it's so *sad*, because those people aren't like us." He looks at Will. "They don't have the skills, the chance, to take revenge."

At that, Will smiles. Perhaps Hannibal was right, and Adam is more like Will than he realized.

"As I said," he murmurs gently, squeezing Adam's hand again, "you don't have to keep hunting, if you don't want to. Your father and I will take care of you, until you're ready to find

a mate of your own and start a family."

Adam's cheeks turn pink, and he gives a small, self-deprecating huff, rubbing his free hand through his short, dark hair.

Before he can reply, Will hears a car. He sucks in a breath, perking up, his eyes wide as he catches the flash of headlights in the sideview mirror. Adam follows his gaze, eyes narrowing as a dark red, large car turns the corner at the end of the driveway, making its way up slowly.

Will releases his hand and hands him the mug. "Tell your father and sisters that they're here," he says.

Adam growls. "I don't like the idea of leaving you alone," he says.

Will smiles, getting out of the car. "Do as you're told," he commands, letting just a little of his Voice slip through. Adam is too young for it to affect him like a full-fledged Alpha, and Will is gentle when he uses it on his children, but Will sees him shiver, hears him let out a plaintive little whine, but he obeys. Will hears his hurried steps retreating and pushes his hands into the pockets of his coat, shivering, and lets a wide smile spread out over his face as the car comes to a halt.

Three doors open all at once – the driver's, the passenger's, and the one behind that, on the right. Will's heart is in his throat, his stomach turning tightly with anticipatory nerves. Then, a set of black, simple-looking heels emerge, modest and functional, and the door closes, and Will sees her.

His breath leaves him all at once. "*Alana*," he says.

Her eyes snap to him, wide and already shining with tears. Her hair is darker, dyed black, her face rounded from pregnancy weight that Will knows from experience is hard to keep off, especially in one's face and stomach. But she looks…incredible. She looks beautiful as always, the wind tugging at her hair like it tugged at Will's, and it seems to be at both their backs, urging them towards each other.

She has a purse in her hand, but she drops it, and rushes to him. Will laughs, flinging himself into her arms and it's like she does the same, for their chests collide strongly enough to knock Will breathless. He puts his face in her hair, one hand buried in the thick waves behind her head. She's vanilla and coconut, raspberry and lime, something that makes him think of beaches sand, makes him think of Italy and expensive cocktails.

"It's really you," she says, and she's trembling – not just from cold. There is a shake to her shoulders he aches to soothe, wrapping his other arm tight around her back, holding her close. He is aware, dimly, that there are other people here now. Alana's wife, her son – and Will can feel the piercing gaze of his own family against his back. "I couldn't believe – hearing your voice, and seeing you, it's…

"I know," Will replies, still at a whisper. Her long nails are digging into his back, clinging to him, and Will had forgotten what she smelled like, forgotten how it felt to hug her, to scent her hair. He drinks her in eagerly, tries to figure out which notes are Margot, which

undercurrent is Morgan. Like whiskey and wine, the family scent has layers, everyone blending together to create something harmonious and pleasant.

He sighs, thinks Morgan might be responsible for the lime, and closes his eyes. "I missed you so much."

She nods, and then her face lifts, and she goes tense. She can probably see Hannibal and the children gathered by the front door. She pulls away, just a little, clearly not wanting to separate from Will too soon, and then Will sighs, lashes fluttering, as he feels Hannibal's large, warm hand spread out along his shoulder.

"It's good to see you, Alana," Hannibal says, with all the poise and cool that he has ever had. He is a seamless trickster, a gracious accommodator, and Will is sure even if his lie had not been so effective, he could have charmed Alana all over again. He is smiling, his hand running up to gently brush through Will's hair and Will sighs, reaching back and taking it from his hair, holding Hannibal's hand gently instead.

After all, if he had reacted too strongly, she might think he's being placated, or coaxed into pliancy. Like this, they stand as equals.

Hannibal's smile doesn't waver; he probably thought the same thing.

"You too," Alana finally says, clearing her throat. "You're looking well."

Hannibal hums, squeezing Will's hand, and Will looks past Alana's shoulder, to her wife and son. Margot is just as he imagined her – round cheeks, angular jaw, big, beautiful eyes and sleek, long brown hair that easily passes her elbows. She's holding Alana's purse close to her side. Her choice of attire looks severe, like she is a Governess about to lay down the law with unruly children; her boots, tight black leggings, and long black coat make her look as some femme fatale, and Will wonders if her interior matches her exterior. Alana has always been somewhat attracted to beautiful messes.

At her side stands a boy, shorter than Will, no older than eighteen. Will can see where Margot and her brother must have shared similar physical features – he has her nose, has the shape of her eyes and the more obvious curl of her hair – but his eyes are bright blue, his hair too dark to be inherited from Margot's side of the family, and his jaw, well, that's all Alana.

He's skinny, waif-like, and his irises have that ever-present ring of Alpha red within them. Both Margot and Morgan are staring at Will, carefully neutral, but Margot has a hand on Morgan's shoulder and when Will meets his eyes, Morgan's chin lifts in a show of challenge.

Very much like a pup to do. Will resists the urge to smile.

"Shall we all go inside? The wind is not forgiving, and the night will only grow darker," Hannibal suggests, still smiling, still serene. Alana clears her throat, and nods, gesturing for Margot and Morgan to join her, as Hannibal lets Will go and leads the way inside.

Will follows, finds Mischa, Shannon, and Adam gathered around the kitchen island like they're extras awaiting the beginning of the next scene. Mischa has taken out wine – two reds

and a white – and the bottles sit in decanters or on ice, and there's a cluster of glasses around them. Will meets her eyes and gives her an approving smile.

Once they're all inside, Hannibal takes on the task of removing and hanging everyone's coats. Beneath Alana's, her dress is blue and modest, coming to her knees and scooping at her neck to show a gold chain with her wedding ring hanging from it. Margot, beside her, is wearing a long emerald green shirt that stops at the top of her thighs and goes to her wrists, though she pushes the sleeves up to reveal her forearms. Morgan is by far the most comfortable-looking of the three of them, in a long-sleeved black Henley, dark jeans, and black shoes. It makes him look more severely pale, ghost-like as his mothers.

They stand in a line like contestants awaiting a judge, and Will smiles, tries to purr as loud as he can so all the Alphas can hear he's calm, and takes Alana's hand, drawing her towards the kitchen.

"Alana," he murmurs. "Margot, Morgan, I'd like you to meet my children. This is Mischa." He gestures to her and she gives them a little wave, a charming smile on her face.

"You guys want anything to drink?"

"Red, please," Margot says, and Alana's eyes flash, hesitantly, to Hannibal.

She clears her throat, rubbing her hand across her neck. "I don't suppose you have beer?"

Hannibal gives her a winning smile, and goes to the fridge. "As a matter of fact, I do," he says, looking absolutely delighted by this fact. Will sees Alana blink, sees her eyes soften with surprised affection, no doubt remembering how eager and able a host Hannibal used to be – still is. He pulls out a dark bottle from the fridge, unlabeled, and takes a long pint glass when Mischa hands it to him. "Thank you, darling."

Mischa grins, nudging his shoulder with her nose, before she takes a glass of wine for Margot that Shannon poured. She hands it to Margot as Hannibal gives Alana her glass, a move in almost perfect synchronization that could have been rehearsed, but Mischa has always been a chameleon for mannerisms, and takes after her father.

"Do you allow Morgan to indulge in wine as well?" Hannibal asks. "There's plenty."

Margot's eyes flash to him and she sips at her wine, giving a surprised-sounding huff at the flavor. She blinks at it, and holds it out to her son. "Would you like to try it?" Morgan looks at her, his eyes dark in the low light, and he shakes his head.

"Water is fine," he replies. "Please."

Mischa nods, and retreats to fill him a glass. "This is Shannon," Will says, in the wake of Alana's silence, and gestures to his second daughter. Shannon smiles, and nods, and then Adam comes up to Will's side. "And my youngest, Adam."

Adam's eyes are on Morgan, very dark, and Morgan takes his water glass from Mischa, stares him down just as easily. Will sighs internally – with only older sisters, Adam never suffered

the very specific behavioral development of sharing space with an Alpha his age. Even most of his friends, if Will recalls, are female or Omega. Siblings fight, of course, but Alphas, especially when close to the presentation age, can get almost violent with each other, especially if there is no Alpha parent around to keep them in line.

Margot clears her throat, and smiles. "It's nice to meet you all," she says. "Even given the circumstances."

Hannibal smiles at her. "Sometimes things must happen a certain way," he replies, and looks to Alana, who presses her lips together, knuckles white around her glass. "There exists, in every universe, a single change in the timeline where everything is different. This is simply the one we find ourselves in."

Alana smiles, faint and yet very fond. She and Hannibal were close friends before Will did what he did; he was her mentor, after all, and a well-respected teacher. Will imagines it's hard to let go of feelings like that, no matter what time or distance has done.

"Dinner will be ready in a few minutes," Hannibal finally says, straightening, and reaches out to touch Adam's shoulder, snapping his gaze away from Morgan. "Adam, please come help me with preparing everything. Please," he finishes, smiling at Alana, Margot, and Morgan, "make yourselves comfortable."

Will meets Alana's eyes, and offers a tentative hand. She takes it, and lets him lead her to the big white couches surrounding the now-lit fireplace. He sits down next to her, Margot on her other side, Morgan on the next couch, and Shannon and Mischa opposite him, on the one Hannibal used to use while they played their Chess games.

She looks at him, looks at him, eyes assessing, before she smiles, widely, and takes her hand back, dabbing below her eyes. "This is so surreal," she says, laughing. "I mean, you – you have *kids* now."

Will laughs. "Yeah, so do you," he replies, nodding to Morgan. "Just the one?"

Alana nods, smiling. "Yes. Morgan's father passed away shortly after he was conceived, God rest his soul." Will tilts his head, spies a sharp, quick look between Margot and Alana, something pleased and amused and Will knows that look because it's the same kind he and Hannibal share frequently. Being in on a secret, it's an intoxicating thing.

"And he…donated?" Will asks.

Margot nods. "My brother was very generous," she replies airily, tapping her forefinger against her wine glass. She smiles at Will, cheeks bulging, teeth very white. Morgan, beside her, smiles like her. "I'm sure he would have given us many children, if he had the opportunity."

They share a smile again and Will hums, sitting back, and reminds himself to look into Mason Verger's death. There's clearly something he's missing here.

The air moves behind him, and Will looks up, smiling when Hannibal brushes a gentle hand through his hair, cupping his cheek, and bends over the back of the couch to steal a gentle kiss, lips brushing Will's forehead before he straightens.

"Dinner is ready," he tells them, and Will stands, letting Hannibal guide him around the back of the couch, towards the dining room table which sits behind a small alcove, around the left of the fireplace, close to the window-wall. Beyond the small hallway is a dining room table, large and glistening off-black. The table has been set, with a golden tablecloth and black cloth placemats, maroon napkins and glasses of water with ice.

Will hesitates on the threshold, unsure where everyone should sit – but it seems Hannibal has already considered this. He kisses Will's cheek, smiling, and places Will on his right-hand side where he normally sits. Across from him, Alana, and by her side, Margot, with Morgan closest to the other end. Shannon is next to Will, Mischa another seat down, in a close-knit row of three.

Hannibal places Adam at the other end of the table, the second head, between Mischa and Morgan. Will is tense, seeing that, because he's sure putting two young Alphas so close to each other is just asking for trouble, but when he meets Hannibal's eyes, he sees them dark. He knows exactly what he's done.

Will's head tilts, and he offers no protest.

"Can I get you something to drink, darling?" he whispers to Will's hair.

Will swallows. "Some more tea would be great," he replies, and Hannibal nods, kissing his temple and petting over Will's shoulder, before he withdraws with Adam in tow to help him with the drinks.

Alana clears her throat, then nods to Will's children. "So, what order?" she asks.

Will smiles. "Mischa's my oldest," he tells her. "She's about to finish her first year of college. Shannon's starting this year, and Adam is the last." He nods to where his son left, knowing Alana will be able to see that Adam doesn't have any red, and hasn't presented yet. "He's about to turn sixteen."

She nods. "Morgan's just turned seventeen," she says, her voice soft and warm with pride. "We were thinking, when he's done with high school, of taking a trip around the world. Or at least Europe."

"I can personally recommend Italy," Will replies. "It's a beautiful country. England, as well."

Alana's eyes snap to him, they do not narrow, nor do they widen, but they are very dark and she presses her lips together and sets her glass of beer down, half-empty. "Is that where you've been?" she whispers, voice thick with emotion. "All this time?"

Will swallows. "Hannibal is familiar with Italy," he says, and immediately knows it's the wrong thing to say – it suggests that he was passive, merely submitted to Hannibal's whims,

and he doesn't want to give her that impression at all. "But I loved it there. And then we moved to England, when the children were older."

He does not specifically mention that it was Mischa's university choice that spurned their actions. That's too much information, for someone with Alana's resources to track down. They could easily find Mischa's full, fake name, and then Will and Hannibal's, their addresses, before the day was done.

Alana clears her throat, and sighs, both elbows on the table and rubbing her hands through her hair. Before she can speak, Hannibal and Adam emerge, Adam with a mug of tea in his hand that he places in front of Will, lightly nuzzling his hair, before Hannibal begins to lay out individual plates, on which is a flaky-crusted meat pie, large holes in the top of the crust to reveal dark meat and what looks like dried cranberries and raisins inside. It smells of cinnamon and butter and Will takes in an appreciative breath, smiling at his mate as Hannibal serves him, first, then Alana from a plate tucked into his arm, and then Margot with the third. Adam brings back two plates and places them in front of his sisters, and then sits as Hannibal returns with a dish for Morgan, then Adam, and he carries the last one to his own spot and sits down.

Hannibal smiles between Alana and Will, and lifts his glass. "To old wounds," he says, and Will frowns, but lifts his tea and Alana raises her beer, Margot following suit with her wine. The children, with water, and Will wants to say it's bad luck to toast with water, but he hardly wants to make a bad impression by serving alcohol, even though Mischa and Shannon are old enough by European standards and most of their children have been guinea pigs to Hannibal's brews. "May we find, in new fellowship and family, a way to see them all healed, and build bridges that will bring us closer than ever."

Will is relieved, at least, to see Alana smile, and she touches her glass to Hannibal's, then Will's, before taking a sip. "Hear, hear," she says, wiping absently at her mouth with a maroon napkin.

Margot digs her fork into her pie, splitting it down the middle, and takes a bite of the meat inside. Her eyes widen and she lets out a soft noise of delight, covering her mouth as she chews and swallows. "Wow," she murmurs, and looks to her wife, then Hannibal. "Alana told me you were an amazing cook. What is this?"

"A humble pork pie," Hannibal replies, smiling with all of his teeth on display. "The English, and I'm sure many other parts of Europe, have a tradition of serving sweet meat during times of celebration – Christmas, the New Year, and so on. And," he pauses, and smiles at Will, "I do like to indulge Will's sweet tooth."

Will blushes, biting his lower lip, and rolls his eyes but it's just for show. "Yes, you suffer *so much* for my sake," he teases, and takes a bite. The crust of the pie crunches on the edge, but becomes soft and warm towards the innards, and feels like he just bit into a richly buttered scone. The meat is almost too hot to stand, burning the roof of his mouth, and sweetly flavored with pine nuts, cinnamon, raisins and dried figs and cranberries. The entire orchestra of taste is amazing, warms Will's chest and his stomach immediately, and makes him think of warm nights by a fire, of hot chocolate and a thick nest of blankets.

He sighs, purring with delight at the offering of food, and Hannibal's knee nudges his under the table.

"So, Alana," Hannibal says after a moment, once everyone has been thoroughly distracted and placated by the food. "You simply must tell me what you've been up to. You have your own practice now?"

"A fledgling one, yes," Alana replies, and looks to Will. "I've only been working solo for the last few years.

Will tilts his head. "Any particular flavor of therapy?" he asks.

She nods, and clears her throat.

"Um, abnormal Omega psychology," she says, and Will hums, lifting his chin. "Specifically, the effects of…Stockholm Syndrome."

Will goes tense. Every member of his family goes tense. "I see."

"There's a lot of people who fit that kind of case, Will. Omegas who are bonded and mated without their full, informed consent. Omegas who are trapped by Alphas or women and forced to resign themselves to being a breeding animal or lose their life."

Will hums again. "Sound like grueling work," he says, trying to keep his voice light. Hannibal sips at his wine, a similar picture of outward control. "I do hope your view of the world hasn't been skewed by such tragic cases."

Alana knows what he's really saying – he can see she knows. She swallows, and reaches across the table, lightly brushing his knuckles. "It hasn't," she says, kindly, sincerely. "I'm big enough to admit when I was wrong, Will. I didn't have all the information, and I didn't have any evidence, and I made up my mind too rashly. But…" She pauses, and tilts her head. "You never reached out to me. For all I knew, you had been killed."

Will winces, and sets his knife down, curling his hand so their fingers can lace. "I know," he replies, for she is right – he never reached out to her, never wrote, never called. He tells himself he had been too busy – first, with making sure he and Hannibal didn't succumb to their wounds. Then, with finding a place and making sure they weren't being followed.

Then, his children, and for the most part Alana had been a background presence in his mind; persistent, but not invasive. She has never gone out of her way to intrude upon his space and the ghost of her didn't either, except in his dreams.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs, and lifts his eyes. Lets them grow wet, tugs at the string of affection he knows Alana still holds and draws her to him. "Can you forgive me?" he asks, and then looks to Hannibal. "Can you forgive both of us? I want to put all this nastiness to bed. I've missed you, and will never forgive myself for robbing you of the chance of meeting my family. And me, meeting yours."

She sighs, eyes watery, and squeezes his hand. "I'd like that," she says.

Hannibal's purr is loud, and he's smiling when he leans in and squeezes Alana's shoulder.

Abruptly, Morgan stands.

"Where's your bathroom?" he asks.

"I'll show you," Adam replies, his eyes flashing in something like a challenge. He rises as well, and gestures for Morgan to follow him out of the dining room. Will watches them go, and viciously clamps down his worry. There's no danger here – he tells himself that, repeats it like a mantra. They own the home turf, and Morgan might have presented already but he's still just a child. And Adam is smart, and well-trained, for his inexperience. Certainly there's nothing Morgan could do in the short time it would take for Adam to let out a cry of alarm, and for Will or Hannibal or his sisters to rush to his aid.

But Margot is watching her son go as well, and seems contemplative and withdrawn. He does not know her well enough to read her eyes, but thinks he sees a little flicker of apprehension, smells the first dregs of sweet anxiety below her perfume.

Will lets go of Alana's hand and forces himself to keep eating, taking a swallow of his cooling tea. "Alana was telling us they wanted to go to Europe for Morgan's gap year," he tells Hannibal. "I suggested Italy. I'm sure you can recommend some places."

"Of course," Hannibal says. If he senses Margot's tension, he doesn't comment on it, nor is he obvious with noticing it. "There is Florence, of course, and though it's largely touristy in places, I highly recommend Rome for the architecture and history alone."

"And the food," Shannon pipes up. Alana blinks at her, smiling. "There's this place near the Trevi fountains that makes the best pizza I've ever had."

"Pizza," she repeats, and lifts a brow at Hannibal. "I never pegged you as the type to eat pizza."

"I'll confess, it's hard for me to refuse my children anything," Hannibal says amiably, a wide smile on his face. "I've found myself quite the pushover since Mischa was born."

Will laughs, and allows the last knot of lingering tension to unravel when Alana does as well. She takes a sip of her beer and gives a hum of appreciation, and Will watches as Hannibal's eyes glow with pleasure. It's not one of Hannibal's brews, since they didn't have time since returning to Maryland, but he's sure it has been altered to fit their unique diets. Hannibal has always liked feeding people their kills, distinctly proud at being able to pull the wool over their eyes.

They eat, and Will becomes aware, after a long while, that Morgan and Adam have not yet returned. His stomach clenches, and he looks at their empty seats, letting out a soft whine. Hannibal, being the only one who can hear it, stiffens immediately.

"Mischa, darling," he says lightly. "Perhaps you can see what's taking your brother so long?"

She nods, standing immediately, and leaves the dining room. Margot's eyes follow her, and Alana's brow creases as she swallows. They wait, in utter silence, hardly eating, and Will lets out a huge sigh of relief when Mischa returns, Morgan and Adam in tow.

He looks over his son, searching for any signs of distress, any anger. He sees none – Morgan didn't attack him, he's sure – but Adam's mouth looks pinker than normal, a flush high on his cheeks that Will doesn't think has anything to do with the warmth in the cabin.

Morgan is grinning, wide.

Will shifts his weight, and looks to Hannibal, finds Hannibal's eyes on Morgan with sharp focus. He clears his throat as they three take their seats again. "We feared you might have gotten lost," he says mildly.

Morgan laughs, and looks at Adam with a wide, eager smile. Adam flushes, biting his lower lip, petting over the back of his neck. Will recognizes that behavior intimately – he does it himself, when he wants to draw Hannibal's attention there. He presses his lips together to fight down the urge to snarl – Adam is unpresented, he's just a *child*, and if Morgan did anything untoward with him, he would be swift to remind him of that fact.

Mischa rubs her hand over her brother's shoulder and Adam leans into it, eyes glassy and flickering with fledgling red. Will lifts his chin, scenting the air, smells something sweet on Adam he has never smelled before. He slants his gaze Alana's way, but Alana and Margot don't have the instincts to smell things like that, to hear how Morgan is purring, to notice the way Adam's fingers tremble when Morgan reaches for his fork and 'accidentally' brushes their hands together.

Unsure what to do, Will presses his knee to Hannibal's beneath the table, and Hannibal smiles, letting out a soft purr to try and soothe Will's nerves. "I'm afraid we don't have a guest room to offer," Hannibal says. "But, if you would all like to stay the night, you may use Will's and my room, and we will sleep on the couches. Morgan can stay with the rest."

"That sounds lovely," Margot says with a wide, eager smile. Will doesn't like it, he doesn't like the idea of Morgan and Adam being beneath the same roof, in the same room, at all, even though he cannot expressly say why. Mischa and Shannon will be with them, after all, and he trusts his daughters to make sure nothing inappropriate happens.

He thinks of Alana's words, tries not to let his mind jump to rash conclusions, and takes a drink of tea to settle his roiling stomach.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

this hurt so much and the amount of yeets was ASTRONOMICAL

Dinner passes without much incident. The hour is late, and the drive was long, and after her second glass Margot's eyes are drooping. Alana gives Will and Hannibal an apologetic smile, but Hannibal is ever-gracious, and tells them to relax in the living room with the children while he and Will go turn down the room and gather a change of clothes for themselves.

Will makes sure to catch Mischa's eye, sees her press her lips together and nod, and she sits on one of the couches with Adam and Shannon, Adam bracketed between his sisters. They sit like two sentinels guarding a king, and Will smiles to himself, pleased that Mischa and Shannon understand his worry over Adam's behavior.

He goes upstairs with his mate, makes sure the door is closed, and then growls, "Morgan did something."

Hannibal neither smiles nor frowns. He pulls back the sheets that are soiled from his and Will's first night here, stained with slick, balls them up and tosses them in the hamper and retrieves a new set from the bathroom closet.

In his silence, Will growls again, but allows Hannibal to hand him half of the fitted sheet, going to the other side of the bed and pulling it tight, tucking the corners in. Hannibal is, still, unresponsive, and when he tosses Will the other sheet, Will snaps at him. "Well?"

Hannibal gives a curious sound, head tilted as he tucks in the bottom corner of the sheet, folding it in from the end, then the side, military-style, and pulls the top edge back to leave room for the pillows. "I'm not sure what you want me to say, darling," he replies. "Other than I believe you're right."

Will's upper lip curls back. "He's a *child*, Hannibal," he snaps.

"Yes," Hannibal replies. "But children kiss." Will blinks, and blanches, and tries not to argue that he's pretty sure they would have done more than that had they not sent Mischa to find them. He doesn't want to think about his children doing anything sexual and certainly doesn't want to argue that viewpoint with his mate.

Then, Hannibal says; "Morgan looks a lot like you."

Will freezes, his eyes wide, and he meets Hannibal's. "…How do you mean?" he asks, very slowly.

Hannibal lifts a shoulder in a shrug. "Blue eyes, dark curly hair. I imagine his build is similar to yours when you were younger, as well."

Will does grimace, then. "Next you're going to tell me Adam wants to fuck me," he hisses. "Like Greystone."

Hannibal, much to his aggravation, merely laughs. "Darling, I'm not saying that at all," he replies with a smile. His head tilts. "Adam has approached me regarding the subject of sexual maturity, and mating. He said you told him to ask me about it."

Will nods, swallowing back the lingering sourness on his tongue. "You're both Alphas," he says. "Or, he will be one soon. I figured you'd give better insight than I could." He crouches down and gathers up the dark duvet cover, throwing Hannibal his side so they can straighten it over the sheets. "What did you tell him?"

At his question, Hannibal sighs. "Unfortunately, we did not discuss it at length," he admits. Will huffs, and straightens the pillows. "But I told him that courting you was – well, I used your child at Christmas analogy."

Unbidden, Will smiles, shivering when he meets Hannibal's dark eyes.

"There you were, sitting like a promise of everything I could ever want, everything I desired. All I had to do was figure out how to approach you." Hannibal's head tilts, eyes raking down. "How to unwrap you. Imagine my surprise and joy when I found not just a sweet, beautiful mate, but a creature just like my own, who wanted me in return."

Will huffs a laugh. "You call it a gift," he says. "I called it a game."

"A game?"

Will nods. "I compared it to playing Chess," he says. "Learning the moves, the way the pieces worked together to achieve a victory, or submit to defeat. Finding someone you enjoyed playing with, who was not your better, but your equal."

Hannibal considers this, lips pursing, and he straightens and goes to the dresser, pulling out sleep clothes for himself and Will. Will follows, taking his own set, and starts to undress, pulling the softer clothes on quickly. Even though Mischa and Shannon are guarding their brother, he doesn't like the idea of leaving them alone for too long – they are, after all, outnumbered.

Hannibal follows suit. "It is possible that Adam is attracted to Alphas," he says mildly, after a while. Will grumbles – he's not homophobic by any means, and he meant what he said to his son, that whatever he chooses to do and whoever he chooses to love and mate with, Will isn't going to judge or shame him for it.

"Doesn't it feel a little *Hamlet*?" Will asks, shifting his weight.

Hannibal laughs. "Insinuating our son and Alana's son mating would be paramount to incest?"

Will winces, rubbing the back of his neck. "You know what I mean."

Hannibal hums, and takes Will's hand, kissing his knuckles. Will sighs, and meets his eyes, but cannot hold his gaze for long. "I will not say your fears are unfounded," he murmurs, "or unwarranted. When I brought you here, all those years ago, I wanted you to become intimate with your instincts, and to tell you to ignore them now would be an insult not just to you, but to our family." Will swallows harshly. "But I would also ask you to simply trust, for now. Try to relax. Your instincts are sharp, but so are those of our children, and Adam has his sisters to watch out for him as well." He offers a small smile, and Will's lips twitch, unable to stop himself answering. "It's just one night."

"Right," Will replies, and resists the urge to tell Hannibal that one night, one singular moment of change, can turn everything on its head. Like an old friend coming for dinner. Like a gunshot wound. Like a mating bite.

Hannibal smiles at him and, finished dressing, they leave the bedroom and return to the downstairs living room. Everyone is just how they left them, though now Alana and Morgan are playing a game of Chess.

"Everything's ready for you, ladies," Hannibal says with a smile. "If you'd like some clothes to sleep in, I'm sure Mischa and Shannon can provide."

"We actually brought an overnight bag," Margot says. Will blinks at her, surprised despite himself that they held such high hope for an invitation. Margot stands. "I'll go get it."

"I'll help," Morgan says, standing as well, and follows his mother out to the car. Will watches him go, and then clears his throat and looks to his children. He sees Mischa give a small shake of her head.

Good. Nothing untoward happened.

"Adam," he murmurs, and smiles in what he hopes is reassurance. He holds out his hand. "Will you come help me clear the table?"

"Sure," Adam says, pulling himself from his sisters and taking Will's hand. Will leads him to the dining room, pleased when no one follows them, and turns, setting both hands on his son's shoulders. Adam shivers, blinking slow, a very subtle but undeniable thread of red in his eyes. He'll present soon.

Adam's head tilts. "You okay, mom?" he asks, gently thumbing at one of Will's wrists.

Will sighs, and forces a smile. He cups Adam's neck, runs one hand through Adam's hair. "I can't believe you're already almost sixteen," he murmurs, wistful. "It seems like just yesterday I was bringing you home from the hospital."

Adam flushes, biting his lower lip. But his eyes are sharp, and he sighs. "Nothing happened," he says. "With me and Morgan."

Will doesn't insult his child by pretending not to know what he's talking about. "I was just worried," he murmurs, petting Adam again, subtly erasing the light cling of Morgan's lime-citrus scent from his neck. "What about Helena?"

Adam's blush darkens, and he rubs the back of his neck, stepping away. He stands behind where he was sat at the table, both hands curling around the back of the chair, and looks at Will.

"I realized something," he says, quietly. "I thought about what you said, about dad." Will tilts his head, brow creasing. "About how he's strong, and makes you feel safe, and makes you feel like you can do anything. I've watched you guys my entire life and…I want that." Will steps close to him, puts a hand on his shaking shoulder. "I want someone who I know will have my back. Not someone I have to protect, or provide for. Someone who can…take care of me. Like dad takes care of you."

Will sighs.

"And I don't think, statistically, I can get that with a woman. Or with an Omega. Not unless I find someone like Mischa and Shannon, or someone like you. And I just don't think that's possible. There's no one like our family in the entire world. All my friends, all of Shannon's and Mischa's friends, they're all so…*soft*." His upper lip curls. "And I think of Edwin, of his family. He was an Alpha, and without him they're going to be lost, and broken, and I don't want to leave my family behind if something happens to me."

Will frowns. "Nothing's going to happen to you, baby," he says, weakly.

"But if it *did*," Adam says insistently. "If it did, they'd be helpless without me. Unless they had someone like you, or like dad, to take my place. So I think…" He sighs. "I don't know. When he touched me I felt…"

Will's hand tightens. He's not sure he wants to hear this.

But; "Go on." He will not let Adam feel ashamed.

"I guess I just…I thought 'this is what it's like'," he finishes, and looks at Will. "Playing Chess. He kissed me and I felt like how dad makes you feel. Mischa's boyfriend is soft, I don't want a boyfriend or girlfriend who hangs on my every word and is too afraid to meet my family but Morgan…wasn't. He isn't afraid of us. His family is strong, like ours is."

Will thinks of that secret look Alana and Margot shared, talking of Mason, and he can't find it in himself to disagree.

So he smiles, and nuzzles Adam gently, kissing his cheek. "I meant what I said," he murmurs, and pulls away to start stacking plates. "Whoever you decide to love, and whatever you decide to do with your life, I will support you and love you unconditionally. I just..." He pauses, and meets Adam's eyes. "I want you to be sure. *Really* sure."

Adam huffs a laugh, his cheeks pink. "Relax, mom," he says, rolling his eyes. "I'm not mated yet."

"I know, baby," Will says, and smiles. "I know."

Morgan, Margot, and Alana go to the main bedroom to settle in, and the children retire to their room. Hannibal and Will remain on the couches. Hannibal has brought extra blankets and pillows for them, and they settle in together, Will's cheek on Hannibal's bicep, his Alpha pressed tight to his back, crowding Will against the back cushions. It's a comfortable and safe cocoon he finds himself in, and he sighs as Hannibal nuzzles his nape.

Hannibal's other hand is flat over his belly, and he lets out a soft purr. "I'd feel remiss if I didn't tell you this much stress isn't good for the baby."

Will rolls his eyes, and stretches. "I seem stressed to you?"

Hannibal lets out a soft laugh, nuzzling Will's hair. "Darling, you can't hide from me," he says warmly, and kisses Will's neck. Will shivers, pressing his lips together, pressing his thighs together tightly as Hannibal shifts closer to him beneath the blanket. "Your scent has been somewhat sour ever since Morgan kissed Adam."

Will huffs. "I'm still not happy about it," he murmurs.

"I know," Hannibal purrs. His hand slides down Will's stomach, then back up.

Will licks his lips, turns to meet his mate's eyes. "Can you smell his scent changing?" he asks. "He's showing red now. It won't be long."

"Triggered by the closeness of a potential mate," Hannibal says, because Will doesn't want to. Will blinks, swallows, and nods. "I have detected a new sweetness to him, yes. I believe we have less than a week before it hits fully."

Will sighs, and thinks of the lawyer. "Should be getting the documents any day now," he says. "Then we can deal with it and this whole nightmare can be put behind us." He pauses, and Hannibal is silent, merely petting his stomach is light circles. "Do you think the girls will want to stay here?"

"Shannon, perhaps," Hannibal replies lightly. "Mischa has more to leave behind."

"I can't help feeling selfish," Will confesses. "I want all of my children to stay here with us. I want to stay here, and have my friends, and have my family, and seal ourselves away from everything that isn't food."

At that, Hannibal huffs a laugh. "Soon, we will have a new child at our table," he murmurs, his hand going still, pressed flat and warm over Will's soft belly. "A whole new life to cherish and cultivate. Perhaps you are selfish, my love – or at least, your body is."

Will smiles. "What does that make you?" he asks.

"A willing slave to your gluttony, mylimasis."

Will laughs, and turns in Hannibal's arms, seeking a kiss. "I love you," he murmurs, gently, loving the flash of adoring red in Hannibal's eyes.

There is, above them, a creak of floorboards. Hannibal and Will turn, Will lifting his head as he sees Morgan come out of Margot and Alana's room. The young Alpha pauses, looking at them. He's changed his long shirt and dark jeans for a softer pair of grey sweatpants and a dark red t-shirt – Alpha colors. He meets their eyes, his own flashing, and then he smiles.

"Goodnight," he says, and makes his way to the children's room.

"Sleep well, Morgan," Hannibal says, his chest rumbling under Will's hand.

Will's nostrils flare as he watches Morgan disappear. Watches the door close. He sighs and buries his face in Hannibal's neck. "I don't know if I'll be able to sleep," he murmurs.

Hannibal rubs over his back, a soothing purr in his chest. "Would you like one of the aids Adam brought you?" he asks.

Will shakes his head. He wants to be alert – cannot afford to be passed out if something bad ended up happening. Not that anything *will*, Mischa and Shannon are upstairs too, and they're both more than able to overpower Morgan if he does something uncalled for.

He sighs, and stifles a whine against Hannibal's neck. Hannibal's arms tighten around him, his purr ratchets up a few tones in pitch and volume, and Will closes his eyes and tries to will himself to sleep.

Will wakes up. The night is still dark, it can't be any later than four or five in the morning.

Hannibal is not on the couch with him.

He shoves himself upright, scrambling to his feet out of the twist of blankets. He can't hear any movement, can't see his mate anywhere. He rushes up the stairs and to the children's bedroom door and flings it wide open.

No one is there.

Panting, sick with anxiety, he flings open the door to his nest. No one is there, either. He's had nightmares like this before, but they always held some odd tone to them, like someone set the color filter in his eyes to show too much blue. In the darkness, everything feels too sharp, his breaths and footsteps too loud.

He goes to the main bedroom, cracks it open and peeks inside. He sees, in the bed, two bodies, two sets of dark, wild hair – Alana and Margot. He swallows, scents the air carefully,

but pulls back. Tries not to panic. Hannibal is nowhere to be seen, and his children aren't where they should be – and neither is Morgan.

He takes in a deep breath, tries to calm the pounding of his heart, the sharp spike of panic in his veins. He treads downstairs silently, and chances calling out; "Hannibal?"

No answer.

It's a dream, it's just a dream. He tries to tell himself that, but even his inner voice is flat and lifeless. His chest is tight, heart thrumming like the wings of a dying bird in his chest. He searches, methodically, hoping to find calm in the steady appraisal of the cabin. No one in the pantry. No one in the laundry room. No one in the kitchen or dining room.

Panic flashes behind his eyes as he looks out to the patio and sees a dark, slick stain on the ground. He knows what it is, before he even steps outside. He pushes the door back, shivering as his bare feet hit the cold ground, his arms and face are bitten and whipped by the wind.

He hears someone crying.

"Mischa?" he calls, and there's a gasp, a sobbing, and a shadow moves and Will sees, his eyes adjusting, his daughters curled up around each other, on the floor, beneath the patio table. He rushes to them, falling to his knees, and reaches out. His hand finds cold cheeks, slick with something, his nose stings from the scent of blood and tears.

"Mama," Mischa says, her voice weak.

"What happened?" Will demands.

Shannon shakes her head, pushing herself close to Will's chest, seeking comfort and warmth. Will wraps an arm around her shoulders, brings his hand from Mischa's face and sees, in the low porch light, a pink sheen.

"Mischa, baby, are you hurt?"

Mischa shivers, her thick voice turning into a growl. "They bit me," she spits. "One of those assholes fucking bit me."

Will's stomach turns, sharply. "Where is your father?" he demands. "Where's Adam?"

In their silence, his cold knot of anxiety returns a thousand-fold. He presses his face to Shannon's, digs his fingers between Mischa's and laces tight. "Come on," he says, and pushes himself upright. "Come on, let's go inside."

He leads them in, to the kitchen, and turns on the light. He turns, and gasps, wide-eyed when he sees them. Mischa and Shannon are both slick with sweat, and Mischa has a huge, welting bite mark on the side of her neck. Shannon's eyes are both deeply bruised, her nose slightly off-kilter like it's been broken. There's a heavy-looking handprint on Mischa's cheek.

"Mama, we're sorry," Mischa says, her bright eyes shining with tears. "There were so many of them."

Will's fingers clench. He tries to breathe, tries not to drag in the scent of his children in pain, tries not to let the fierce, burning anger overwhelm him when he sees what someone did to his daughters. "Tell me what happened," he says, and though he tries to quell it, his anger is so thick that he uses his Voice.

Shannon flinches.

"They came all at once," she says flatly, petting Mischa's hair from her face. Her nose is bleeding and she wipes at it, sniffing and wincing in pain. Her voice is thick and throaty, probably from so much mucus and blood. Mischa dabs at her neck, hissing, her bruised jaw clenching in something more akin to anger than anything else. "They took Adam."

It's just a dream, it's just a dream.

"They took dad."

Just a dream.

"What do you mean, they *took* them?" Will demands.

"There was a struggle," Mischa whispers, sounding far away. Her eyes are on her own hands. "They broke into the room, knocked Morgan out cold and dragged him outside. Adam ran to help him, and we went after. Dad was there, too, fighting them all, but there were so *many* of them, mama. They -."

It's just a dream.

Will steps back, swallows harshly, and lifts his eyes to the ceiling. Stares, at one of the lights. Hopes that maybe if he stares long enough he'll wake up. "Did they hurt him?" he whispers.

Mischa lets out a sob, covering her mouth, and Shannon looks at Will. "We didn't see," she says, her eyes bright and leaking down her bloodied face. "I heard dad snarling. He told us to stay where we were, when they were all gone. I think they knocked him out but he went after them."

Of course he did.

It's just a dream.

"We should have gone after him," Mischa says coldly, glaring down at her bruised hands. Her knuckles are split, her teeth shine. It looks like she got some of her own bites in. Though Will's chest is a chaotic blend of anger, of fear and outrage, he cannot help be proud. "We should be hunting those sons of bitches down, right now."

Before Will can reply, he hears the front door opening, and his head snaps up, eyes widening as he sees Hannibal come in. There's blood at the corner of his mouth, his eyes are blazing

red, his temple bloody and a mean-looking bruise coloring the side of his face. He's walking with a limp.

"Papa!" Mischa breathes, straightening.

Hannibal comes to a halt, regarding his daughters. Regarding Will.

"Please," Will whispers. "Tell me this is just a dream."

Hannibal looks at him, his eyes blazing with wrath, his mouth pressed into a thin line. His gaze shifts away, to Mischa, to Shannon, and Will watches his entire expression change, becoming a black mask of anger.

"No, Will," he says, coldly. "I'm afraid this is not a dream."

Will doesn't let himself sag. Doesn't let himself collapse – he can't. His family needs him, they need him, and his daughters and mate are injured and he has to, has to take care of them. Has to remain calm.

He swallows, flexes his fingers, and nods. "Sit," he tells Hannibal, using his Voice to be sure he's obeyed. Hannibal blinks at him, upper lip lifting in a light snarl, but Will turns away from him, turns on the sink and fills a bowl with warm water, and grabs three hand towels. He takes them to Mischa and Shannon and Hannibal slowly, reluctantly, comes forward and sits beside Mischa on the bar stools. "Are you injured anywhere else?"

Hannibal nods. "I was grazed by a bullet," he says.

Will freezes, gaping at him, and Mischa and Shannon fix him with wide eyes as well. "Oh my God, dad!" Shannon whispers.

Hannibal shakes his head, shrugging off his coat, growling at the pull of wet cloth on his skin. Will can see it, now, staining his white shirt beneath his black coat. There is a huge swatch of dried blood on Hannibal's flank, and he lifts his shirt, tutting at the ugly-looking graze on his flank. "It didn't pierce me," he says, and Will has no idea if it's meant to be a reassurance but it sure as Hell doesn't sound like one.

Hannibal takes one of the hand towels, wets it, and dabs at his side, jaw clenching in pain. "Will," he says, and Will looks at him. "There is a first aid kit in the coat closet. If you wouldn't mind?" Will nods, swallowing, and goes to the closet. He finds it in the bottom of the closet, by the shoes, and brings it back to the kitchen island. "Thank you, darling."

Will breathes out, and looks over at Shannon. "Come here, baby," he says gently, and cups her face in his hands. He feels tenderly over her cheeks, and she hisses, showing her teeth when he brushes his thumb gently over the off angle of her nose. "This is gonna hurt."

She nods, swallowing harshly, and reaches out to squeeze Mischa's hand.

"Pull down with it, Will," Hannibal's voice comes. "Do not push."

Will nods, pressing his lips together. He swallows, and kisses Shannon's forehead, waits for her to relax, instinctively wanting to press close to him, before he presses in and down with his thumbs in a slow roll. He feels the cartilage shift, hears it crackle and pop, hears her whimper and tense beneath his hands, and he doesn't let up, doesn't pull away until he can rub his thumbs up again, making sure it's back in line.

He pulls back when he's done, eyes the swelling and bruising already forming, and thumbs at the tear tracks running down her face. "There we go, baby," he says gently. "Hardest part's over now."

She swallows, and nods. "Can I take some painkillers?"

Hannibal, without a word, slides the first aid kit over, and she tears out a packet of Ibuprofen, swallowing them dry.

"Here," Will says, handing her a wet towel. "Wipe your face off." She nods, and takes it. Will turns to Hannibal, sees him already placing a pad of gauze and some tape over his bullet wound, absently cleaning his face with his other hand.

Mischa is silent, trembling, her face in her hands.

Will sighs, and presses his cheek to the top of her head. His hands settle gently on her shoulders and squeeze, and he looks at Hannibal.

"How many?" he asks.

Hannibal presses his lips together. "Two cars," he replies. "I counted six, including the drivers."

"Before or after you got to them?" Will asks darkly.

Hannibal meets his eyes, and offers a sharp smile. "After," he replies. "There were eight, before."

Will nods, pleased that at least some retribution has already been had. "Recognize any of them?" he asks. They could have been FBI, or some of Hannibal's old colleagues, or anyone. Anyone at all, except -.

Except not anyone. Because no one knew they were here except…

He looks up, and frowns. He moves away from his family, up the stairs, and opens the door to the master bedroom again and flicks on the light. Alana stirs, groaning sleepily, and wipes at her face. She sits up when she sees Will.

"Will, what's -?" Her eyes drop, and widen. "Is that blood?"

"Margot with you?" Will asks sharply.

Alana frowns, and touches the lump by her side. It doesn't move, and her frown deepens. She pulls the sheet back, her eyes widening to see it is just a lump of pillows with a flare of

brown hair at the head. She picks it up, hands trembling when she touches it. A wig.

Will's eyes fall to the bedside table. His sleep aids are sitting there, next to a glass of water.

He goes to them, picks them up in one hand and tosses them to the other. "You take these?" he asks, tilting his head. His voice is calm and cold, icy with outrage.

She looks at him, eyes watery. "I -. Sometimes I need help sleeping," she says.

Will presses his lips together. "Did Margot give you these, or Morgan?"

"Morgan did," she replies. "I assumed they were mine."

Will nods to himself, and thinks of the tea he'd abandoned while changing the sheets, that he'd finished after coming back down. Thinks of Morgan, left unattended, and Margot, who had been free to roam while his daughters' eyes were focused on Morgan. He'd been so *stupid*.

"Will, what's going on?"

"Adam's missing," he says, and his voice shakes. He does collapse then, on the bed, at her feet. He puts his elbows on his knees, his hands swiping over his mouth and Shannon's blood is on his fingers, Mischa's blood, Mischa's tears. "Adam was taken. And Morgan and Margot are gone."

"*What*?"

Will looks at her, meets her eyes and narrows his. Then, he swallows. "You didn't know," he says. Of course she didn't know – she has always been a frightfully honest person, and Will cannot for the life of him think of a single reason she would not have disappeared with them, during the night, if she was in on it.

"Didn't know what? What happened?" she asks, clenching the wig in her hands tightly.

"No one knew we were here, Alana," Will whispers. "No one knew, except my family, and yours." His head tilts. "No one knew what Hannibal and I had done, except my family, and yours."

"Will, please, I swear to God, I have no idea what you're talking about," she says, and he can sense no lie in her, no guile, no deception. He nods to himself, stares down at the bottle of sleeping pills in his hand, and snarls, tossing them away. They clatter to a halt on the bathroom floor.

"Get up," he says, standing. "And get dressed. My son is missing, and your family is gone, and we're going to find them. Right fucking now."

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

~~~plot twist~~~

Will returns to the kitchen to find Hannibal standing, Mischa's hair swept to one side as he carefully cleans and inspects the bite mark on the side of her neck. New, fresh rage stirs like a great beast in Will's chest, and it feels like it takes all of his strength to force it back down and yet, his tongue is sour in his mouth and he isn't sure he'll be able to speak, once Alana appears, without snapping his teeth together.

Shannon has cleaned her face as well and has a bag of frozen peas pressed over her nose – a small bag, so her eyes are just visible. Will almost wants to laugh at the stereotype – he's pretty sure Hannibal has never served them anything frozen in any of their children's lives, but he has them now.

"They drugged her," Will says, when Mischa lifts her head. Hannibal has cleaned the bite mark, and placed a large bandage around the side of her neck – but it is not large enough to cover the swollen, bruised flesh around the bite.

He has not thought of Abigail Hobbs for a long time. But she had blue eyes, like Mischa inherited from Will. She had long, dark hair, and with it swept to one side and that bandage on her neck – she died, she had died in that house, because Will couldn't save her. Because he had been too slow, too weak, too overcome by those out of sync instincts that Hannibal had been so able to correct, later.

Potential. Mischa could have died, just like Abigail died, and Will was once again too weak, too slow, sleeping on the *Goddamn* couch while he family fought for their lives and -.

"Will."

Hannibal's hand flattens on his shoulder and Will startles – he hadn't even been aware that his mate had moved, just suddenly feels his heat, the broad expanse of his chest, and he straightens, realizing that his teeth had been bared, his shoulders up, a low rumble splitting the air.

He stops, his throat hoarse, and swallows back his snarl. Hannibal's hand runs up his shoulder, to the nape of his neck, and it would be so easy, so easy to let Hannibal's touch flatten on his nape, to squeeze the pressure points that will encourage a feeling of calm and pliancy. It would be easy, to let his mate take this feeling away, to simply relax, and float, at least for a little while.
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He shrugs Hannibal's hand away and fixes him with a look, then nods upstairs. "Alana took sleeping pills," he says. "And Margot is gone."

Hannibal tilts his head, and frowns. "I didn't see her with the others," he says, slowly.

"Their car?"

"Still here."

Will presses his lips together, breathes out steadily, and counts to three. He braces his hands on the kitchen counter, rolls his shoulders, and tenses when Hannibal's hand presses to his back. Hannibal doesn't try to touch his neck, nor does he slide his hand down to the small of Will's back where a similar placation point is – just lets it rest, behind his heart, and Will swallows and hates how heavily the air stinks of blood. His *family's* blood.

"I think Margot drugged me," he says, finally. "I think she and Morgan are working together – Alana told me she takes sleeping pills too, and Morgan gave mine to her and told her they were hers. So we'd both be down for the count when…"

Hannibal is silent, considering this, and Will lifts his eyes to see Mischa and Shannon watching them. Shannon is braiding Mischa's hair, taking too long and making it too loose, it'll fall out almost as soon as it's done. Shannon's nose is bulging terribly from the break, but she's not crying or bleeding anymore, and Mischa has cleaned her hands.

"Is Alana awake?" Hannibal says.

Will nods. "I told her Margot and Morgan were gone," he replies. "I didn't say Morgan was taken."

Hannibal nods, just a shadow of movement in the corner of Will's eye. Will turns his head and looks at his mate, sees that Hannibal has, aside from cleaning and bandaging his bullet wound, left the process of tending to his facial injuries undone. Will frowns, and nudges him to sit again, takes the bowl of pinkish water and the stained towel and wipes at his face.

"Let us look at what we know," Hannibal says, his eyes on Will as Will knots the towel, wets it, and gently brushes it along the stain of blood at Hannibal's temple and in his hair. Hannibal closes his eyes, presses his lips together, and his hands are wide and gentle on Will's hips, steadying for now, as if Will might simply collapse without a touch on him.

Will is not that weak. He can't afford to be, especially now.

"What time did they come?" he asks.

Mischa shakes her head. "Maybe three? Three-thirty?"

Will's eyes move to the clock in the panel of the stove. It's just past four in the morning. "They waited until they were sure everyone would be asleep," he says, and his free fist tightens, knuckles pressed gently to Hannibal's jaw, to get him to tilt his head up so Will can clean away the blood at the side of his mouth. "They must have been watching."

At that, Mischa snarls.

"Did you get a look at the one that bit you?" Shannon asks, pressing her chin to Mischa's hair.

Mischa shakes her head, huffing in disgust as she pats tenderly over the bandage on her neck. "Got me from behind," she says. "Smelled Alpha, but of course he would, that much shit going on." Her eyes flash to Will, and grow soft and irreparably sad. "I'm sorry, mama, I tried -."

"Oh, Mischa, no," Will says. He shakes his head and sets the towel down, reaching out so that he can squeeze her shoulder, and Hannibal's head tucks under his, and Mischa has an arm wrapped around Shannon so they're all tied together, all touching but mindful of each other's injuries. "It's not your fault, baby, I'm not angry with you at all."

Above them, the sounds of footsteps break the silence, and Will pulls back, swallowing a low growl with all his might as he listens to Alana emerging from the master bedroom. She crosses to the stairs and comes down, in a set of shimmery blue pajamas, her feet bare and her hair tied back in a ponytail to hide the fact that she didn't brush it.

She gets halfway across the living room before she sees them, and stops, her eyes widening and a shocked gasp falling from her lips.

Either she's the greatest actress in the world, or she's just as surprised as Will was.

"Oh my *God*," she says, and rushes forward. She touches Will, first, even though he's the least injured out of all of them, and her eyes are bright with unshed tears as she looks to Hannibal, and their daughters. "What the Hell happened?"

"Like you don't know," Mischa hisses, her eyes narrowed.

Will holds out a hand, quieting her. "Adam, Morgan, and Margot are gone," he says, as evenly and gently as he can manage. Alana turns to him, her face pale and shocked. Will thinks she is very brave, or very trusting, to have her neck so exposed and turn her back on Hannibal, who still doesn't seem to have decided between outright wrath or deadly calm. "I believe one of them drugged us, so that we wouldn't wake up."

"But that's…" Alana swallows, and says weakly, looking to Mischa and Shannon and Hannibal's injuries; "Margot's not a fighter. And Morgan is still young; he couldn't have done that much damage."

"There were eight others," Hannibal says. He stands, likely bothered at so many heads above his own, and fixes Alana with a sharp look, so heavy she visibly flinches from it.

Ah, so the wrath is winning out. Good.

"But why?" Alana breathes. Her tears are falling now, and she lifts her hands to wipe briskly at her cheeks. "Why would someone do this?"

And isn't that the name of the game? Of course, Will and his family are not good people in the eyes of the law – he's sure there are countless amounts of lives they have touched in

negative ways. But only his family, and Alana's, knew they would be in this cabin. Only they knew the address, and -.

"Will," Hannibal says, and Will blinks, snapping from his thoughts. "Perhaps it is time to dust off that perfect vision of yours."

Will frowns, sinking his teeth into his lower lip. He looks upstairs, breathes in, breathes out. His fingers flex and he cannot help letting out a little whine. He doesn't want to go up there, he doesn't want to read the room. It's been so long since he dared do something like that, since he *needed* to do something like that, and with the suggestion comes bitter memories of Jack, of his life before his children, before Hannibal, when he was overdosing on suppressants and had waking nightmares.

"Alone," he says, and it's not a question. He looks to Alana, sees her hands shaking, her eyes darting wide between Shannon, Mischa, Hannibal, and then to Will. "Have a seat," he says, and nods to where Hannibal was sitting, next to Mischa. "There's a lot we have to talk about."

"Will, I swear, I didn't know -. I *don't* know what's going on."

Will doesn't smile. He doesn't shake his head. He goes to the stairs, and feels Hannibal's eyes burning into the back of his head as he ascends them. His hand touches the rail, and he looks down, tilts his head. Leans in and takes a breath where there is a single smudge of grease, like Vaseline.

It is Vaseline, he realizes, recognizing the subtly waxy scent. He straightens, and goes to the top hallway. There's a scuff on the floor by his nest door and he looks down at it, and it looks like someone chipped off the paint – either they fell, or were thrown. There's a small black smear like a streak of oil or grease. Not made by someone barefoot – not Adam, or Morgan.

Another few steps brings him to the children's bedroom, and he swallows, rolls his shoulders, and opens the door. The handle is, he notices, for he did not notice before, similarly wet with Vaseline, and he frowns, rubbing his fingers together, and steps over the threshold.

Immediately, the overwhelming scent of *Alpha* assaults him. He swallows, hissing, and resists the urge to rub his hands over his mouth and nose, to clog the scents. He takes a deep, slow, deliberate drag of air through his mouth, tastes Morgan's lime scent, Mischa's and Shannon's sweeter, woodsy scents, and finally, under it all, Adam's.

Adam's is different. Unpresented Alphas generally have a milder scent, but now it is sharp. It is mint, and salt, like the aftertaste of a mojito. He can't help think it compliments Morgan's rather nicely – generally mated pairs have harmonious scents, but they are so strong right now that all Will feels is drunk.

The children slept in a nest, altogether, though the blankets are askew now. He can see where Morgan clearly had been sleeping, curled up on one side, and had been dragged – by the ankles, it looks like, judging from the way the sheets are knotted and pressed in a single broad swipe. Shoulders, a back, made that.

He tilts his head, takes another step in. There's a dip and crease in the nest closer to the door, and Will crouches down on all fours, lowering his head until he can catch Mischa's scent. So, they stepped over Mischa to get to Morgan.

He breathes in again and winces, covering his mouth when the scent of an Alpha, a foreign one, hits his nose. Morgan was the target, but Mischa was in the way.

He can see it, clear as day – a man, a big man, prowling into his children's room, a big man putting a hand over Mischa's mouth and biting her to keep her still and pliant while an accomplice went for Morgan. He wants to ask if that's how it happened, but could not bear to know the answer. The image of his daughter pinned and silenced under a brutish shadow of a man is enough to turn his stomach.

His fingers clench, and he lifts his head and breathes. *Don't lose it now*, he tells himself. He can't afford to lose focus – his son is still missing, and Will knows the statistics for kidnapping and knows everything there is to know about preferential offenders and desperately, desperately wishes he didn't.

Shannon slept between Adam and Morgan. He can see her indent, see a few shed curls of her hair on the pillow at the other side of the nest square. So, one man pinned Mischa. A second dragged Morgan out by his ankles, to the hallway. Maybe scuffing his shoe while he did it.

Then someone must have -.

His eyes close. He sees Shannon rising, alerted by her sister's muffled cry and the grunts of a man hauling Morgan away. Sees her rising to her feet, snarling, ready to attack. Sees her run out – he turns his head, follows her shade as she runs in his mind's eye. Maybe the first man let Mischa go, deeming her subdued, and hauled Shannon back and broke her nose to stop her chasing.

But that doesn't make sense. Unless…

Will rises, and goes out of the room and looks, really looks, at the carpet. There are a few droplets of blood – Shannon's, he would guess, though they could just as well be Mischa's from her bite. There are also, he sees, a notable lack of drag-marks. He crouches down and brushes his fingers towards him, noting how the carpet gets darker, going against the grain, then lighter when he pulls the strands the other way. The carpet is not this light anywhere else.

Which means at some point, Morgan wasn't being dragged anymore.

Knowing what he knows, he finds it hard to believe that the kid was being carried. It's much more likely that he stood up and walked away on his own.

He stands, a hot bubble of acidic anger in his chest, fit to burst. He doesn't want to know what will happen when it does, but he cannot bear to observe any more of what remains of his children's nest. He knows enough to have a direction; his compass will not spin, rashly seeking someone to blame.

He goes back downstairs. Alana has the harried, panicked expression of a cow that has just seen the slaughterhouse – the whites of her eyes are stark, and she looks at him when he descends the stairs and returns to the kitchen.

He holds his hand out to her, showing her the shine of the Vaseline on his fingers. "Lotion?" he asks.

She swallows. "Morgan and Margot use it," she says. "They have dry skin – they all do, Mason did too."

"This was on the door handle," he says. "And the bannister."

She meets his eyes, and Will can tell she knows what he's suggesting, but doesn't want to admit it. She swallows, and shakes her head. "Alana," he says, forcing his voice to be very gentle, "did you tell anyone that Hannibal and I were back in the country?"

"No!" she says, earnestly. She reaches out and touches his arm and Will pulls back, refusing the connection. "Will, I swore I wouldn't tell anyone. I didn't back then, and I wouldn't now – *please* believe me."

Will wants to believe her. He wants to believe her desperately.

"She's lying," Mischa says sharply, but in Italian, so Alana can't understand her. Will looks at her, finds her eyes narrowed and sharp on Alana's face.

"If she was in on it, they had no reason to drug her," Will replies, also in Italian.

"She could have faked it," Shannon says. "She could be lying about that, too – or this is all a ruse to make us believe she's innocent."

Will doesn't think she's capable of that kind of deception, but he's been wrong about that kind of thing before. And twenty years is a long time for someone's heart to harden, for something to become twisted and malevolent in the unforgiving halls of memory.

He looks to Hannibal, finds him staring, absent-gazed, at the kitchen counter.

"What do you think?" he asks, still in Italian. Alana curls her legs, feet resting on the rung of the barstool, nervously kneading at her thighs. She looks so small and vulnerable, in this room full of killers. Good – she should be afraid. She should be nervous.

Hannibal's nostrils flare, and he lifts his eyes to meet Will's. Will swallows, seeing how much red there is to them – he hasn't seen Hannibal this angry, this close to his instincts, since the night they killed Jack. Though Hannibal's red had become ever-present since the birth of their children, it has always been a subtle thing. But now, in the low light, his eyes burn with wrath.

"I think that, for a very long time, our friend here," he does not look at Alana, but his fingers curl, and then flex out, "has had to live with knowing we are out, in the world, and the last memory she had of us was a traumatic event." He does look at her, then, piercing. Her

shoulders curl in, curl up, and she looks between Hannibal and Will nervously. "I think this trauma would have been impossible to keep secret from her wife."

Will nods.

"Will, please," Alana says, and stands. Will shifts back and Shannon growls, coming around her sister, prepared to block Alana from Will, to defend her mother. Alana flinches, but holds steady. "Let me call Margot. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for all of this, and I'm sure I -."

"We can't let her call Margot," Mischa says, spitting the words in Italian, and gets to her feet. "She could tell her something."

Will is inclined to agree. He's not sure what to think.

"There are no drag marks outside the room," he tells his family. He looks to Mischa and Shannon. "Did you see what happened to Morgan, after Adam went after him?"

Mischa shakes her head, touches the bandage around her neck and winces. "It was too dark," she says, voice thick. "I couldn't see anything."

"And you?" Will asks, addressing Hannibal this time.

Hannibal sighs through his nose, pressing his lips together. "I woke when I heard Mischa cry out," he says. "By the time I got outside, they were loading Adam into one of the vehicles." His mouth twists, and he snarls. "I should have chased them by car. I wasn't thinking."

"It hasn't been long," Shannon says. "The trail is still warm. We can go after them."

Will sighs, rubbing his hands through his hair and cupping the back of his neck. He feels sick to his stomach, so tense with worry and anxiety. He's exhausted, and hates, *hates*, that he wasn't there to help. He should have woken up, he should have fought alongside his mate and daughters to help his son. And now Adam is gone and he could have *done something*.

"We can't go to the police," he says, in English.

Alana's eyes snap up, wide and teary.

"Please," she whispers, and reaches for Will again. This time Hannibal comes forward, takes her wrist in a firm grip and forces her hand back down.

"Be wise, Alana," he says darkly. "I'd hate to have to lock you in a pantry again."

Her eyes widen further, and she swallows, her fingers shaking when Hannibal lets her go. "Morgan and Margot didn't do anything," she says, and Will wonders how she can think that, when given evidence of Margot's betrayal – innocent people don't make the bed and leave a wig behind to make it seem like they're still there. "I'm sure this is all -."

"Frankly, Alana, I don't give a shit what you're 'sure' of," Will snaps, the bubble of anger in his chest finally bursting. "Look at the Goddamn evidence! We're here for less than a week,

and the night you and your family show up, strangers bust in and take my son. Take *our* sons." She winces, sitting back down. "I don't care what your intentions were, I don't even care if you knew about it, but the fact of the matter is that my son is gone, and all signs point to your family being somehow involved."

"Will," she says, and nothing else. More tears are falling. Will cannot allow himself to soften at the sight of them.

"One way or another, this is a kidnapping," Will says, and turns to his daughters. "Mischa, go upstairs and get Alana's phone, and Margot's phone, and search their bags for anything suspicious. Shannon, you do the same with Morgan's things in your room. If they intend to contact us for a ransom, we can expect their call soon enough."

They nod, and disperse.

He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him, and he looks to his mate. "Leave me alone with her," he says in Italian.

Hannibal's nostrils flare, but he nods. "I'll get our phones as well," he says. "Just in case."

Will nods, and watches his mate as he leaves the kitchen. He is still walking with a slight limp, and there's blood on his thigh. Will swallows, but knows it's not serious, otherwise Hannibal would have addressed it along with his gunshot wound.

He waits until he is sure they are alone, and looks to Alana again. She's still crying, her shoulders shaking, and she looks so lost and, dimly, Will wonders if he ever looked like as much of a mess.

He sighs, and sits on the second barstool. "Alana," he says gently, far too gently for how he feels, and takes her hands when she turns to him. He puts his fingers along her pulse and finds it racing. "I'm going to ask you this once, and if you ever loved me, if you ever valued our friendship, you will answer me honestly."

"Of course," she says, and her fingers curl around his wrists.

Will meets her eyes steadily, remembers when he had trouble maintaining eye contact with anyone, let alone her. "Did you ever share with Margot, or Morgan, what happened that night?" he asks. "The night I killed Jack?"

"I…" His fingers tighten around her pulse, and she winces, and looks down. She swallows, presses her lips together, and nods. "I would have nightmares, sometimes. Margot asked me about them and I told her what…what happened."

"So she knows that Hannibal and I have killed."

"Yes."

"Does Morgan know?"

She frowns, tilting her head. "I never told him," she says. "I mean, maybe Margot did, or maybe he overheard us some nights, but I never told him."

"Morgan knew my name," he tells her. "When I called you. He knew who I was. He tried to seduce my son, tried to get close to him."

"Will, I -."

"Do Margot or Morgan have the kind of friends that would be capable of doing something like this?"

She shakes her head vehemently, hard enough that Will fears for the strength of her neck, and meets his eyes. "No," she says. "No, Margot has always been sweet, and kind. She's too gentle for something like this."

Will tilts his head. "I see," he says, and pulls his hands away. She wants to reach for him, obviously, but holds herself back, her eyes darting to the shadow of the doorway like Hannibal might appear at any moment.

"Let me call her," Alana pleads. If she thinks Will is the easiest target, she is sorely mistaken.

He shakes his head, and stands. "No," he replies, and nods in greeting when Hannibal returns, their phones in hand. Behind him, Shannon and Mischa follow.

There's a set of papers in Mischa's hand, folded in three. She's gripping it with white knuckles, and slams it down on the counter.

"This was in Morgan's bag," she says darkly.

Will frowns, and takes the papers, opening them. It's a contract for the acquisition of the farmlands, bought by the Verger estate. Will remembers Adam mentioning that. He frowns, and looks to Alana.

"Your wife's company recently bought a bunch of land around New Orleans," he says. "Do you know anything about that?"

Alana frowns, tilting her head, and nods. "It was part of the expansion," she replies. "Margot wanted to – she said land was cheap there, and they wanted to be able to ship meat and raise pigs in more places across the States."

Will hums, his eyes dragging down the contract. He flips the page.

He freezes, when he sees what Mischa undoubtedly noticed. There, in a tiny, neat line, is the signature of the previous owner of the farmlands. Below, the name, printed:

Christopher and Lisa Graham.

Will's cousin, and his wife – the Alpha who would wrestle him on camping trips, who insisted that an Omega needed to protect himself, but it was up to the status and pedigree of the Alpha to make sure his mate and children were taken care of.

He turns to the first page and checks the date. This was done merely a month prior to Will's mother's death.

"Son of a bitch," he whispers, and hands the contract to Hannibal.

Hannibal looks over the contract, his jaw tightening when he undoubtedly comes to the same conclusion.

Will can see it now – Margot, knowing the truth, or at least some of it. Reaching out to Will's family, to that conservative pack who valued the breeding of the Omega, the solid pride of a well-rounded family. They would have found it quite interesting to hear the story of their cousin, who had been 'manipulated' and 'abducted' by a murderer.

They might have taken it upon themselves to pay Will a visit and, finding him with an Alpha child, been compelled to remove him, to preserve the bloodline. They would have made sure Will was drugged, out of commission, so he didn't get hurt – eight Alphas is more than enough to overwhelm a family, even one as strong and well-trained as his own, but if Chris had been involved, he wouldn't have wanted Will to get hurt.

Hell, for all Will knows, he might have been a target as well. But Hannibal and the girls got in the way. Or Margot told them it was a lost cause, that Will was already too loyal, too brainwashed, to be of use.

His fingers curl into fists, and he can't help wondering if Chris knows he's pregnant, now, too.

Will straightens, and snarls to his daughters; "Pack your things." Mischa nods, her eyes dark and determined, and she takes Shannon's hand and leads her back out of the kitchen.

Hannibal sets the contract down, and his eyes meet Will's. He understands, already, what Will intends to do – Will sees a flash of acceptance, the same steel-lined determination that Mischa had given. He nods, and looks to Alana.

"Looks like we're going to Louisiana after all," he says tightly, and smiles at her. She looks between them, eyes wide, and after a moment, nods. That's good – it would do her no favors to fight them now. "Pack your stuff. We leave in an hour."

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though Will hates the idea with his whole being, he concedes that it would be smarter to take both their rental and Alana's car to Louisiana. They won't fly – Will's family, if they are the ones behind it, wouldn't risk flying with two young Alphas, one of whom is dangerously close to going into rut, and unless Margot and Morgan came prepared, they wouldn't bother with going back to the Verger Estate for everything else.

They will drive – as Shannon said, the trail is still warm, and though there are many routes along the East coast to go up or down, from where they are, the options for Louisiana are slimmer. Either way, the I-95 is their most likely option if they want to get away quickly.

Which, if they're smart, speed should be their priority.

He's snapped out of his thoughts by the presence of Hannibal's shadow, and turns just in time for Hannibal to rest his hands on Will's hips, both of them staring down at the open suitcase on their bed while Shannon and Mischa guard Alana. The wig Margot planted is still at the head of the bed and Will sighs, rubbing his hands over his face.

He tilts, his eyes closing as Hannibal kisses his cheek, and Hannibal's arms tighten. He stinks of anger, of the very specifically sharp spice of guilt. They both do. Neither of them speak – the pain and the outrage is too new, and far too fresh. After a moment, Hannibal kisses his neck again and withdraws. Will watches him go to the bathroom and pause, seeing the discarded bottle of sleep aids on the floor. He picks them up, another flash of deep, deep rage tightening his features for a moment.

His fist closes around the bottle and he looks at Will. "Do you remember the day you found out I had swapped out your suppressant medication for painkillers?"

Will huffs. That betrayal – though he's hesitant to call it a betrayal and more his mate's brand of aggressive, invasive therapy, just like the whole exercise had been – is an old wound and doesn't even hurt when it's prodded. He nods, swallowing harshly. "Yes," he replies, and sighs. "But I was never really, truly angry with you for doing it. I understood why."

"Of course you did," Hannibal murmurs fondly. He sets the bottle on top of the dresser with another sigh. "You have always had a keen insight into the human mind. Mine. Alana's. Your children's." Will swallows. "What does your insight tell you about your family?"

Will flinches, rolling up a t-shirt and stuffing it into the corner of the suitcase. He hasn't really been paying attention to if he's packing anything worth a damn – he is the more militant packer, always has been, leftover from his time as a cop. Everything in its place, everything ergonomically set and efficient by design.

"I don't know," he says flatly, and zips the suitcase closed, hauling it off the bed and onto its wheels. Behind him, Hannibal's disbelief is like a physical touch and Will rolls his shoulders and goes to the closet, finally changing out of his sleepwear into something warmer and something he can travel in. It doesn't escape him that his jeans feel a little tighter than normal around the stomach as he pulls them on.

"Darling," Hannibal murmurs, exasperated when Will remains silent.

Will pulls a sweater over his head and whirls on him. "I don't *know*," he repeats, showing his teeth. Hannibal presses his lips together and sighs through his nose, but refuses to break eye contact. "I haven't talked to Chris in years, even before I moved to Virginia. I have no idea how he could have found us, how he could have mobilized so quickly and brought enough – I don't even have eight Alpha cousins! I have Chris, and the rest are female or Omega. So I don't fucking *know*, alright?"

Hannibal watches him, until Will finishes, and the rest of his breath comes out in a frantic whine – a whine that spurs Hannibal to sudden action, and he crosses the room and embraces Will tightly, letting Will bury his face in Hannibal's neck and cling to him.

He couldn't let himself show fear, show panic, around Alana and his daughters. But Hannibal is safe. Hannibal is strong, and Will is – Will is fucking *weak*. He was drugged and useless and everyone around him that isn't his family seems so convinced that he can't make his own choices, and now his son is suffering the consequences for them. And Adam must be so terrified, half out of his mind with rut, and Will isn't there to help him.

He swallows harshly, his throat so tight he can't breathe, until he hears Hannibal purring. It's forced, Will can tell it's forced, but it soothes him nonetheless and he gasps, and clenches his eyes tightly shut so that tears don't fall. He has to be strong and he has to be calm, and focused.

It's just another crime scene. Just another son of a bitch to put in chains.

Or in the ground.

He turns his face into his mate's neck, breathing in deeply, and lets out a quiet hiss when he smells blood on Hannibal's skin. His own blood – someone hurt his mate and he'd done nothing to stop it.

"Shh," Hannibal murmurs, wrapping gentle fingers through Will's hair and tugging, just enough to get him to stop snarling, to settle, placated as Hannibal's palm flattens along his nape. "We will find him."

Will nods. "I know," he says, pulling away. And he does know – because failure is not an option. Anything less than the safe return of his son and the complete ruin on those that took him, both Hannibal and Will would not tolerate. They will bring a reckoning, he knows that, feels the vow like a mating bite and like a Voice all its own.

Hannibal offers a smile, and offers his hand. "Come, darling," he says, and Will nods again, takes the suitcase in one hand and Hannibal's in the other, and they go downstairs. Will sets

the suitcase down by the door and as they head back to the kitchen, he hears a phone ringing.

"Mama!" Mischa says, holding it up. It's not one of theirs – Alana's. "Margot's number."

Will nods, forces himself back into the pillar of salt and stone that he must be, for the sake of his children. He takes the phone and holds it up, showing Alana the name on the screen. "You will answer calmly," he tells her, and remembers when he had spoken to her like this last – in Hannibal's house, with Jack's corpse on the ground and his blood on Will's hands. "You will pretend that she woke you by calling. You will pretend you have no idea anything has happened."

She nods, wide-eyed, and Will answers the call and sets the phone on speaker, putting it down between them as they form a ring around the end of the kitchen island.

Alana clears her throat, makes a sound like she's stifling a yawn, and says, "Hello?"

There is silence, for a long time, and then a voice comes and it's a man's voice. "Put Will on the phone."

Will frowns, and Alana's eyes snap to him. She straightens, breathing in slowly, and sounds concerned. "Who is this? Where is Margot?"

"Doctor Bloom, put Will on the phone."

Will doesn't recognize his voice, but he has that Louisiana drawl Will grew up with and, when he moved further North, tried desperately to train himself out of. He *might* be Chris, but it's been so long, Will doesn't know his voice on first listen. Still, he bristles, remains silent, and gestures for Alana to keep going.

"I'm…afraid you have me at a disadvantage," Alana says slowly. "You seem to know me, and my friend, but I don't know you."

At that, there is a short, sharp laugh. "Will," another voice says, and Will's spine goes cold, because he *definitely* knows that voice. Recognizes the sharp, slow croon of it. He straightens up sharply, grimacing and fighting the urge to cover his neck with all his might. "I know you're there. Listen, I'm sure you've got all kinds of questions, but you don't need to be concerned. We're not gonna hurt your boy."

Will's upper lip curls back, a snarl rumbling in his chest, but Hannibal shoots him a look and gives a minute shake of his head, and Will rubs a hand over his mouth, swallowing it back. Right. Pretend they're not here.

Alana leans in, her voice turning frantic. "What's going on? I don't know what you're talking about. Did you take Adam?"

The man on the phone laughs, and Will's fingers curl. He growls, and looks at his daughters, and wonders which one of them he hurt. Was he the one who dragged Morgan out by his ankles, or the one that covered and bit Mischa, so she couldn't run away, or the one who broke Shannon's nose – or, even, the one who knocked out Adam and took him?

"Please," Alana says. "Let me talk to Margot."

Before anyone can respond, Hannibal reaches out, takes the phone, and ends the call. Alana blinks at him, and then she glares. "Why did you do that?" she demands.

Hannibal tilts his head, lips pursed. "Clearly we are dealing with someone who enjoys the thought of causing us distress," he says lightly, and sets the phone down again. "We will not be answering it again until we are on the road."

"But…what if they hurt Adam?" Shannon asks, her eyes wide and red-rimmed. Even in such a short time, her nose and under her eyes has grown incredibly dark, almost black, and Will swallows, rubbing anxiously at the insides of his wrists.

"They won't," he says, and tries to sound as firm about it as he should be. "They clearly came in and they had a target. They passed me, and your father, and went straight for your brother and Morgan. That means they had a goal and they're not going to take them and drive all the way to Louisiana just to kill them."

Hannibal nods, and shifts his weight, wincing when his injured thigh locks up. It is a nearly imperceptible expression, but Will has known and loved Hannibal for years and can see every tic, every hidden gesture in neon now.

He nudges, gently, at Hannibal's shoulder, and makes him sit. Hannibal goes, reluctantly, and takes Will's hand.

"He said I didn't have to be concerned," Will says, brow creasing as he thinks. He can feel his family's eyes on him, feel Alana's distress like a sour note in the air. "Not afraid, not worried. Concerned. Like…"

"Implies familiarity," Alana supplies, looking up and meeting Will's gaze. "It's a less dramatic word."

Will nods, and licks his lips. "I think it was Chris," he says. Hannibal's fingers tighten between his and, almost-silently, Hannibal snarls. "It sounded like him. Or it sounded like how he used to sound. And he's the one who owned the land your estate bought," he adds, nodding to Alana. "So, all signs point to him being involved."

"If their intention was to kill him, or any of us, they wouldn't have bothered moving him to a secondary location, and *definitely* not after papa killed two of them," Mischa says with a nod, her expression grim. Alana has covered her mouth, now, thinly-veiled horror in her eyes as she looks between Will and Hannibal. Of course, she knows they've killed before, but he supposes it's a strange kind of surreal to hear a girl barely old enough to go to college talk about kidnapping statistics so calmly.

There's a darkness in Hannibal's eyes that Will recognizes – he's thinking, putting puzzle pieces together into neatly interlocking rows, but he won't present his theory to Will or their children or Alana until it is fully formed.

Will sighs, and rolls his shoulders. "Alana, you're riding with me and Mischa," he says, and she nods numbly, swallowing, her fingernails tapping flat against her teeth. "Shannon, you're going with your father. We'll use phones to stay connected and keep Alana's charging, since they obviously know hers and not ours."

Mischa nods, and stands, going to the bags by the door. Alana's bag is with Shannon's and Mischa's, and Will takes his and Hannibal's, refusing Hannibal's offer to carry it.

"You're injured," he says with a huff. "You're not carrying shit until I say so."

At that, Hannibal manages a smile. "As you wish, darling."

They pack the cars and Hannibal locks up the cabin. Hannibal takes the rental car, Shannon in the passenger seat. Will is in Alana's car, Alana beside him and Mischa perched in the backseat between them, so she can see out. Alana's car has Bluetooth, so he can pair his phone and call Hannibal, and they can all hear each other and communicate if need be.

"I-95, yeah?" Will asks. Alana's car was parked behind theirs, so he's the first to pull out and start down the road, Hannibal's lights flooding the rearview mirror as Hannibal follows him.

Hannibal gives a soft sound of assent, and they drive for a while in silence, until Will slows, eyes narrowed as he sees a dark bulge of a shadow on the side of the road. At this hour, it's possible for deer to be out and about, so he slows down, and then his eyes widen as he sees not a deer, nor any other large animal, but a shape vaguely human, a wisp of hair and a huge bloodstain just visible on the edge of the lights.

Alana's eyes are wide.

Will huffs, and says, "I think we found one of your kills, Hannibal."

"It's possible," Hannibal replies coolly, pulling over as Will does. Will turns on the brites and gets out of the car, circling the front. He nudges the body until it rolls onto its back, a bulbous face and wide staring eyes looking back at him. His head tilts. He doesn't recognize the person's face.

He hears Alana's footsteps, and she covers her mouth with both hands, letting out a ragged sob, her eyes flooding with tears as she looks at the man – an Alpha, by the stink of him. "Oh my God, that's Cordell!"

Will tilts his head.

"He was – he was Mason's nurse, before he died," Alana explains, shaking her head. She pulls her hair to one side, tugging on it in a gesture Will recognizes from when they were friends, so long ago. She does that when she's nervous.

"Mason died almost twenty years ago." That's Mischa's voice, as she appears between Alana's and Will's shoulders. She looks down, dispassionately, at the body. "You said he died before Morgan was born."

"Yes," Alana says, nodding. "He stayed on with us, though – helped me with Morgan, and then just remained around the house and he would teach Morgan things I…didn't have the stomach for, anymore."

Will hums, and lifts his chin. "Morgan was home-schooled?" he asks.

Alana nods. Her lips press together and the noise she makes is sad, and guilty. "It was safer for him with us," she says. And Will understands. Just as they spent their lives looking over their shoulders, as much as he was plagued by nightmares of Alana finding them and bringing down all the fury of the law onto his family, apparently she had felt the same fears. How ironic – or perhaps poetic? – that they are suffering together, now.

Will's head turns as he catches Hannibal's scent, spies him with Shannon at his shoulder as he approaches the three of them. "One of Alana's house crew," he says, nodding to the body. "Apparently he was a nurse, and one of Morgan's teachers."

Hannibal's eyes flash. Will can practically *see* the puzzle forming. Hannibal has found the corners and now he's piecing the edges together, little by little, until he has a frame through which to sift all the fine details.

"Is the other body nearby?" Will asks.

Hannibal lifts a shoulder. "Apparently this man had enough wherewithal to crawl," he says. "I didn't kill him here."

Will nods. "I'd like to see him," he says. "Perhaps another recognizable face."

Hannibal nods, and holds his hand out to Mischa. "Come with me, my love," he says, and she nods, pulling her phone out to use as a flashlight, and they make their way into the trees, hand in hand. The night is cold and Will shivers, folding his arms across his chest, breath puffing out in a thick cloud as he stares at the unblinking eyes of Cordell.

"You know," Will says after a moment. Shannon is perched behind the open door of the passenger seat of Alana's car, tenderly thumbing at her bruised cheeks, and just far away enough that Will knows his words won't be overheard; "I never wanted to hurt you. If you felt unsafe because of what happened…"

Alana shakes her head. "I didn't know," she says, just as quietly. "I didn't know what to think, Will. All I knew is that someone I trusted took my friend away, and when they came back you were…. *Fuck*." She wipes vehemently at her eyes. "You were bruised to all Hell, frantic, maybe you don't remember it like I do, but I thought he was going to kill you if you didn't do what he said. And you'd always been so sweet and gentle, to see you do what you did to Jack…. I couldn't reconcile that Will with the Will I knew."

Will sighs through his nose, shakes his head.

"But I realized, after a long time and a *lot* of therapy, that the Will I knew wasn't the real one." Will frowns, and looks in her direction, down at her shoes. "You – I mean, shit, we all got used to pretending. I let myself think you were just some troubled Omega being led

around on Jack's leash, and then when Jack gave you to Hannibal I didn't stop to think if it was something you actually wanted, or if it was helping you. I was jealous that he could help you where I couldn't, and -." She stops, and huffs a bitter laugh. "Hannibal told me, when he suggested behavioral therapy, that I pride myself on owning a monopoly on your friendships."

Unbidden, Will smiles.

"I didn't want to believe that, but he was right. Of course he was right. And I…. It's unfair that I projected this stereotype onto you, and when you didn't fit that mold, I assumed it was because he'd *done* something. It was selfish of me to think that there was something wrong with you because I was too blinded by an ideal of you to see what he clearly saw."

Will hums, and Alana shakes her head, sighing heavily, and wipes both hands through her hair.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that I would never, *never*, do anything to hurt your family, because I can see that you love them, and you love him, no matter what. And I get that – I get that because I love Margot like that, and I have a kid too, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for either of them."

Will nods, and turns to face her, finds her pale and her eyes red-rimmed, and he sighs, and wraps an arm around her shoulders, letting her tuck her head beneath his chin. He meets Shannon's eyes and smiles when she huffs, kicking her legs out, and circles a finger by her temple in a 'She's crazy' motion.

Will sighs, and kisses her hair, before he withdraws but he lets her take his hand and their fingers lace, tightly. "I'm sorry I never reached out to you," he says. "Even to tell you that I was okay, or that you were safe. The only regret I've ever had about anything that went down that night is how it ended things between us."

She gives him a thin, watery smile, and heaves a breath, looking away. "You really think Margot and Morgan had something to do with this?" she asks. A little ways away, there is the sound of twigs snapping, of branches and leaves crushed underfoot, and Will sees the little pinprick light of Mischa's cell phone guiding her way back.

"I believe they're involved," he says, and squeezes her hand. "But I don't know how, yet."

Alana nods, and says, "I just can't imagine that they would do something like this. No matter what they believed."

Will tilts his head, keeps his voice calm and measured; "And what do they believe?"

She winces. "Well, I had to tell Margot about that…that night. Since I was having so many nightmares about it. Maybe she told Morgan, maybe not, I don't know. But she knows you and Hannibal killed Jack. I…I couldn't lie to her. I didn't say it was self-defense. I didn't say it was an accident."

Will sighs, but it's too long ago for him to be angry about that.

"Will," Alana says, as the light comes closer. "Hannibal killed two men tonight." He nods. "None of your family seem very shaken by that."

Will laughs, and that appears to startle her – her head turns abruptly, hair fanning out wide before settling around her shoulders, and Will shrugs. "Alana, my mate was a psychiatrist and surgeon. I profiled serial killers for a living. We killed a man and went on the run after I went so crazy chasing down a killer that I went into *rut*. What part of that suggests I wouldn't make sure my children were comfortable around death and chaos?"

"That's different," Alana hisses. "That's all…theory."

"Oh," Will says coolly. "So Morgan never took any self-defense classes, no psychology courses, never learned about the darker side of the world, is that it?"

Her teeth snap together with an audible click, and she huffs, but doesn't argue.

Hannibal and Mischa emerge from the trees. Mischa clicks off her phone light as the headlights illuminate them, and Alana frowns. "You didn't find the body?"

"We did," Mischa says, and unlocks her phone. She tilts the screen as she pulls up photos, and hands it over to Will. It's another man, an Alpha if the subtly red hue in his eyes is any indication. His fangs are exposed in a vicious snarl, his neck a knotted mess of claw and teeth marks. Will's stomach clenches sharply, and he meets Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal smiles.

"Do you recognize him, Alana?" he asks.

Alana takes the phone, and shakes her head, frowning. "No," she replies. "This guy wasn't one of the staff."

Will frowns, and takes the phone from her. He tilts his head, looking him over. He doesn't recognize the guy either – but it's possible Chris has friends, ones sympathetic to his cause, whatever that might be.

With a snarl of frustration, he locks Mischa's phone and hands it back. Hannibal's hand settles gently on his shoulder, squeezing, and Will looks at him, nudges gently at his neck for a small, soothing inhale of his mate's scent, before he pulls away.

"No sense standing around waiting," he mutters. "Come on. We're wasting time."

"Will," Hannibal calls, and Will stops, turning to regard him as Mischa, Shannon, and Alana trail back to the cars. Hannibal reaches for him and Will sighs, letting himself be taken by the neck, by the shoulders, lets Hannibal nuzzle and kiss him, lightly. Hannibal's scent is subtly sharp in a way Will has only smelled a few times before, long ago – when he was giving birth. Worried. Hannibal smells worried.

Will sighs, and wraps his fingers in Hannibal's damp hair, kissing him chastely. "We're going to find him," he says. He can be strong for Hannibal, too, if he has to be. Until it's over. "And

I don't care who's involved – my cousins, Alana's staff, I don't give a fuck if the whole damn state comes after us. We're getting Adam back."

"I know," Hannibal says, breathlessly, and his hands slide down to Will's flanks, tighten just a touch. His eyes are dark, burning with red, and he rests their foreheads together and breathes out. This is Hannibal's worst fear, Will knows – he said as much on the plane, and Will wishes he could soothe that fear, wishes he could wipe it away, but he can't. Hannibal lost his sister already, felt the pain of it deeply; his failure as an Alpha. God help the people who dared to take his son away.

"Come on," Will says, and lets him go. He offers a smile and though Hannibal's mouth does not return it, his eyes are warm, his touch fond and full of adoration as he runs a hand through Will's hair, squeezes his shoulder, and then lets go. "Let's go get our son back."

They get back into their respective cars and begin the drive again, down the narrow road where the trees grow so close, they brush the sides of the car, out onto the main feed road, then onto the one that passes through town, two lanes on each side of the yellow line. It merges onto the I-95 and Will heads South, towards Baltimore.

"How long will it take us to drive there?" Mischa asks.

Will huffs, and smiles. "About twelve hours," he replies. "If we don't stop."

"Oh my *God*," she breathes. Being raised in Europe, Will knows anything longer than half an hour feels like a lifetime to his children. He looks to Alana and finds her rolling her eyes, exasperated and fond despite the overlying tension.

Then, the air grows sober, and Mischa says, "I think Adam is gonna go into rut before they get there."

Will's fingers tighten on the steering wheel, and over their phone connection, he hears Hannibal sigh. He nods, slowly, thinks of Adam's sweetening scent, the subtle flicker of red growing in his eyes. Adam knows what to expect, and thankfully first ruts do not last long, but that's an incredible amount of stress to put on someone in perfect health, let alone a terrified and kidnapped child.

"Morgan will take care of him," Alana says softly, hesitantly, like she's not sure if that would help. Will swallows and forces himself not to reply that this whole thing might be Morgan's fault.

"Let's hope so," he says instead, and presses down harder on the gas.

Chapter End Notes

for the rest of the story I'm probably going to have to jump between POVs, so except some Adam scenes in the next few chapters.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> so turns out writing Adam's POV is super fun? I'll be doing more of it for sure :D
> I wrote and proofread this on no sleep right before I had to leave so I'm sorry if I missed any typos! though let's be real I always miss SOME typos

Adam wakes to nothingness – such a profound, stark nothingness. The first thought that comes to his mind is that he is dead, followed by the manic thought that, perhaps, he was never actually alive. Maybe the womb is a different kind of awareness, and birth a reincarnation that wipes the slate clean.

It is dark. He is cold, so cold, like the summer before when he caught that flu virus going around, and his mother had spent the entire long weekend with him, buried in a horde of blankets, his gentle hands petting through Adam's sweaty hair while Adam heaved and whimpered and sweated through the fever.

He swallows, and rolls onto his side, and knows for a fact that the first thing he cries out for should not be his mother. That's what pups do, that's what scared children who are not born of killers do. He comes from a strong bloodline.

A voice, that sounds like mama's, says in the back of his mind; "Just stay calm. Observe. What do you feel? What can you hear?"

It is like being in the trunk of that car, except he is very, very cold. The confinement of that trunk space had soon turned sweltering, clammy and sticky like breathing through molasses. He remembers the sticky-sweet cling of it, the time his class had been taken on a field trip to the local farm. Remembers the safety videos of all the horrible ways kids could die. Remembers watching the one fall in a vat of slurry – another one, wrecked in a combine harvester like a bad slasher movie.

He knows that smell. It is hay, covered in molasses. They…people feed that to cows. Or maybe horses.

He closes his eyes, presses his lips together, and trembles.

"What do you smell, baby? Besides the sweet?"

He imagines this is just another exercise. His mother and father are on the outside of the trunk. He just has to figure out how to open it from the inside. He parts his lips and drags in a deep breath, through his nose, and over the scenting palette on the roof of his mouth.

He blanches. *Alpha*. It's a sharp, curdling scent like sour milk, not like how his father smells at all. He is woodsmoke, paper, fine wine. This scent is *cheap*, it is expired dairy and moldy cheese; it is over-sweet molasses and the fever-damp of rotting wood.

"Just the one, baby? Is that all you smell?"

It is certainly the strongest scent, but when Adam breathes in again, he detects others. They all layer over each other like an upturned jigsaw puzzle, flashes of color connecting one person to another – husband to wife, father to son, brother to brother. Wherever he is, it is a place large enough to accommodate heavy traffic.

There is, also, another scent. Citrus-lime and jasmine. He knows that sound. Margot Verger. Margot is here, or was, at some point. Adam's fingers clench, and he makes a sound that is like a growl, but too base for much volume.

"Careful, Adam." His father's voice has come, now, another little stream of consciousness and advice, whispering to his left ear while his mother purrs into his right. "Are you alone? You must make sure you are alone, before you move."

Right. That's smart. Adam quiets his breathing, slits his eyes open and tries to listen to anything around him. He's almost certain he's on a farm, if nothing for the smell of sweet hay and sour milk, and when he opens his eyes, he finds himself in a structure just barn-like enough for it to confirm his theory. The floor is cement and streaked lightly with straw, like it once held an animal but had to be quickly swept away.

"To make room for you," his father's voice tells him. "They were rushed. They weren't prepared."

"Because you went after them when they got their real target," his mother says, heavy with a judgement he has never actually heard come out of his mouth. His mother is gentle with Adam, and with his sisters, and has only shown savagery when it comes to their hunts – or, recently. Too much stress, that can't be good for the baby.

"You need to focus on yourself, Adam," his father's voice says. "Where are you?"

Wherever he is, it is dark, in the same half-muted way that buildings are dark on the inside when it's day out but there aren't enough windows. He sits up, carefully taking stock of any injuries – his head hurts like a bitch, his shoulder is sore and probably bruised, but nothing seems broken and nothing doesn't move when he tells it to, and nothing is pointing in the wrong direction.

"Lucky," his mother whispers.

"Unless he was the target all along."

Adam's brows come together, and he pushes himself to his feet. His eyes are adjusting, painting the world in a dazed blue like watercolor paint spread too thick. He reaches out with his good arm, until his fingers find a wall. It is wood, and he leans in, sniffs at it. Well, that explains the rotting wood smell, at least.

His fingers track up and suddenly there is no more wall, and he gasps, falling forward, only to have his forearm caught by two metal bars. He hisses, more out of shock than anything else, and pulls back. He touches the rim of the wall and finds it at about the same height as his chin, and then, above it, bars.

His upper lip curls. "I think I'm in a fucking stable."

The first flash of panic scenarios that comes into his head is that he's been sold to some kind of underground sex trafficking ring. The kind of place where they keep unpresented kids locked up for perusal and bidding – but it is another flight of fancy, and he discards it quickly. He has those often. When he was younger, he would tell his father about his waking dreams and see something like pride in his eyes when he told Adam his mother has them too.

"Seeing the world as he does is a unique and wonderful thing," he had said. "But it is not without its burdens. With the right instruction and plenty of practice, you may hone it as he has. Sometimes, what you see, and what you notice, can be the thing that saves your life."

Adam swallows, nodding to himself, and runs his hands along the bars like kids do with sticks on gates, until it hits a corner. The wooden part of the wall is lower, here, and he growls when he feels a dip in the bars, too – a place where a horse's head could go.

All in all, he is in a simple stall. The ground is concrete, though not as pockmarked and uncomfortable as it could be, which he supposes is a small blessing. Wherever he is, it was clearly intended for him, rushed or not, which means he isn't going to be immediately killed.

He can't see outside, can't tell if he's facing North or South or whatever direction. There's no wind, no bird song he recognizes, not even the bluster or call of any animals to tell him that he's got a neighbor. He blinks rapidly, forcing his eyes to adjust, and steps to where the metal dips low, wrapping his hands on either side and peering out.

"Always assume the worst-case scenario." It was Mischa who told him that. Mischa, sitting and letting Shannon braid her hair while Adam worked her through physical therapy on her arm. She'd busted it up badly enough to warrant the school to call an ambulance for her, which meant a medical history and a paper trail, and Adam had thought their father would eat the entire school if mama hadn't calmed him down. They always calmed each other down, no matter what, like they were both hooked up to a drug only the other could administer.

What must it be like, to be bonded like that?

"Focus, baby," his mother's voice says, and Adam nods to himself, huffs, and looks one way, then the other. It's – well, it's certainly a stable. With all the nondescript boringness of a stable – the middle aisle is wood, a brown color deep enough that in the darkness it appears as a cavernous maw. The ceiling, the same, stretching too high for him to make out detail. He does notice that there aren't *no* windows, but all the windows appear to be shuttered, sealed closed, so only a thin border of light surrounds it and allows him to see.

"Assume the worst," Mischa says. Adam can remember the spongey feeling of her bones beneath his hand. He has never thought of either of his sisters as delicate; it was the first time he'd ever seen evidence that either of them could break. Could be broken.

He shivers.

"They don't want to kill me," Adam tells her, and she grins, nodding. "Because if that was the goal there's no point taking me to…wherever the Hell I am."

"Unless they wanted to draw it out," Shannon supplies.

Adam considers this, then shakes his head, huffing. "No. No. There's no reason to target me unless it's personal. Preferential offenders wouldn't come into a home with four adults and four kids and only take me."

And Morgan.

"You assume they only took you," Mischa says, gently, her eyes just like their mother's when she smiles at him and cups his face with her good hand. "Maybe they killed all of us. Maybe you're the only one left."

"You're gonna get tortured, or sold off, or God knows what else."

Adam shakes the thoughts away sharply, snapping his teeth together. No. Even if the rest of it were true, he absolutely, *absolutely* refuses to believe that anyone could have killed his parents. They're too smart, they're too strong, and yes, his mother is gentle, and yes, his father is devoted, but they are not to be trifled with and he refuses to let his mind think otherwise.

His hands flex, and he looks down at them. He's not chained up, nothing's broken. He can't hear anyone outside, certainly can't see anyone, and this is just another car trunk. He just has to figure out how to escape it.

He feels along the outside of the wall, searching for a bolt or latch he can undo. There is one, but it feels like it's been knocked off and the door has been bolted to the wall, so he can't push it open – nor, he finds, should he kick it, because he tries but it makes such an ungodly loud sound that he knows it will draw attention sooner rather than later.

"You gotta climb, baby," his mother says.

He nods, and steps back until his shoulders hit the opposite wall. In the darkness, depth perception is shot to Hell, but he counts his steps and figures five big ones should do it. He crouches, pushes himself off the wall, and runs at the other side, jumping and landing with a solid *oof* as his stomach collides with the metal dip where a horse's head could go.

Shannon is giggling. "Should'a been a gymnast."

"Shut up," Adam huffs, rolling his eyes. He brings his foot up and hooks it in the wall, shoves himself over and onto the other side, landing with a grimace. His shoulder did *not* appreciate any of that, and it reminds him of the fact sharply, along with a dull throbbing in his head. His stomach aches like a bitch but he forces himself not to think about it.

He should look for a weapon, but even if he had time to spare for one, it's too dark to see. And they could come back at any moment, whoever the Hell 'they' are.

He goes left, towards the larger silhouette of what looks like a door, ringed in sunlight. He hurries to the door, as quiet as his father taught him to be, and presses a hand, gently, on the seam of it at his chest height. It creaks, the heavy frame scraping against the subtly off-angle floor, and he winces, and slips outside the second the hole is large enough for him to fit through.

The day is bright, the sky beautifully blue in a way England rarely is. Adam shields his eyes, ducking down to the side of the barn – stable? Barn, whatever, it doesn't matter – and around until he spies a van backed up to a large pile of hay and straw. White panel, nondescript in suburbia but on this farm, it looks weirdly out of place. Too clean, like it belongs to a hospital.

He turns his head and shies back when he hears a second engine coming. A big black pickup truck swings around the dirt road ridging the stable, slams to a halt next to the van, and three huge Alphas pile out. Adam shivers, freezing despite the heat of the sun on his face, on his arms, and then his spine grows cold when one of the Alphas reaches into the bed of the truck and hauls Morgan, unconscious and limp, over his shoulder. His face is stained brightly with blood and it's soaked into his hair, and there's blood on his fingertips too – like he tried to claw, and fight.

One of the Alphas has a mean-looking rake of claw marks on his upper arm.

Adam smiles. *Good*.

From behind the van, flicking a discarded cigarette butt and stamping it under his shoe, appears a fourth Alpha. He's tall, but willowy, and there's something about the set of his jaw and angle of his grin that seems familiar.

"The fuck took you so long?" he asks. He eyes Morgan and the Alpha carrying him distastefully, and Adam shrinks back further. There's a pile of that sweet molasses-hay next to him and he crowds close to it, lets the scent of it hide his own from the other Alphas.

The other Alpha that drove the truck whirls on smoking-Alpha, eyes red and voice vibrating with rage. "What *took* us so long?" he demands, and jabs an accusing finger into smoker's chest. "Where the fuck were *you*?"

"Takin' care of family, of course," smoker says, and pulls his packet of cigarettes out from his shirt pocket, lighting another one, weight canted and hips cocked. He is the picture of cavalier Alpha pride, the leader of the pack, Adam is sure. He watches as smoker takes a deep drag, holds it, and blows it right into the second Alpha's face. "What's got your panties in a twist, Murray?"

The second Alpha growls, waving the smoke cloud away, and then fixes smoker with a heavy, dark look. "Cordell is dead," he says. "Lawrence, too."

That stops smoker. He freezes mid-inhale, his eyes wide, and the sudden flash of red in his eyes is frightening. "Who did it?" he demands.

"Who do you think?" Murray replies. "The fucking Alpha!"

Smoker puffs out a breath, nostrils flared wide, and he swallows and nods. "Lawrence was a good man," he says, and Adam stifles his growl because he's pretty sure *none* of these men are good men. One man's villain, he supposes. "Cordell, well, we can explain that to Lady Verger. Don't give a fuck -."

"I don't think you're *gettin'* me, Graham," Murray says, jabbing another finger. "I saw 'em go down. That fucker took 'em down like it was *nothin*', and if what the kid said is true, their whole fuckin' *family* is like that."

Adam frowns. 'Lady Verger'? 'The kid'?

Graham?

It could be a first name, of course, but Adam looks at the smoking Alpha, *really* looks at him, and realizes why he looks so Goddamn familiar. He and his mother have the same jawline, they smile the same lopsided way. If this Alpha were a brunet, the resemblance would be startling.

But he doesn't have an uncle, not one that he knows of, at least. No aunts, no uncles, no cousins. Which means he has to go back a generation and he thinks, maybe, he remembers his mother mentioning that *he* had an uncle…

His head is throbbing and he's so fucking *cold*, and he hisses, closing his eyes and pressing the heel of his hand to his tender forehead. It pulses like a beating heart, and he's dehydrated, because his mouth feels tacky and he can't get enough saliva. His heart is racing, panicked and confused and he doesn't have enough information, he can't even hear his parents' advice anymore, can't think of anything except for how fucking *cold* he is.

"…You smell that?"

He freezes, but has no room to run and nowhere to hide. Murray appears like a looming shadow in front of him, and the Alpha hisses, hauling Adam up by the scruff of his neck. He turns to the smoking Alpha.

"Fuckin' see, Chris? The whole *family*."

Adam whines, pawing weakly at the tight hand around his neck, and then he hears the first Alpha's – Chris' – response. It's a heavy, cold voice he uses, deadly and powerful and Adam thinks he might see more family resemblance, now;

"Drop him, Murray."

Murray obeys, and Adam falls to his hands and knees, panting. Shoes appear in his vision – brown, boots, wetted at the toes – and then Chris kneels down and cups Adam's chin, lifting him up.

Their eyes meet, and Chris' head tilts, and he smells like cigarettes and raw sugar cane and Adam winces, showing his teeth. That earns him a smile. "Damn," he whispers, breath leaving him in a huge gust. "Didn't get any of little Will in this one, did he?" He tilts Adam's

head, making him bare his neck and Adam growls, but he's weak and small and unpresented and his head hurts and he's *cold*. "He's all that Alpha."

He wraps his fingers around Adam's throat and hauls them both to their feet. Adam goes with a yelp, eyes wide, and Chris smiles at him, too-sharp, showing all his teeth.

"Hey, pup, it's okay," he says, and though his hand gentles on Adam's throat, it does not let go. He's very, *very* aware that he's surrounded by four big, angry-smelling Alphas and they know his father killed two of them and he's proud, he's glad two of them are dead, but he's small and young and a perfect target for revenge.

"They won't kill you, baby," his mother's voice purrs at him.

"No, they won't kill you," his father adds. "But you might suffer. Are you prepared to suffer?"

Is anyone prepared for that?

Murray snarls. "We got him right as he's goin' into fuckin' rut!"

"Good," Chris replies, crooning the word. "It's a perfect age. Old enough to learn how to defend yourself, young enough to still be shown the right way." Chris' head tilts and Adam growls at him, though it's a meek sound. He's trembling too hard to stand, and sags with only Chris' grip holding him up. Chris sighs. "We're gonna need to lock 'im up better, though. Basement cleared yet?"

"Yeah," comes a reply, a third voice, one of the other Alphas. Chris nods, flicks away his cigarette, and fists his other hand in Adam's hair, guiding him into a stumbling half-walk as they walk towards a – there's a house. A Goddamn house, why didn't he run for the house, for the phone?

Adam growls, trying to twist and turn away. There are no cars by the house, so it stands to reason they're the only ones there, which means if Adam can get inside he can lock all the doors and windows and buy himself enough time to call his parents – but. He turns, and sees the Alpha carrying Morgan into the barn, and lets out a harsh, needy whine.

Chris pauses, holding Adam like he weighs nothing, like his struggles aren't even worth noticing, and he follows Adam's gaze. "He a friend of yours, pup?"

"Morgan," Adam says, raggedly.

Chris says nothing, for a long time. Long enough for Adam to watch the other Alpha carry Morgan into the stable, and for the door to close behind them both. He whines at the loss of sight of him – he has to get to him, he has to make sure he's alright. There'd been so much blood…

Chris growls, and yanks on his hair. "Come on."

They agree, in one of those silent moments of unison that pass between Hannibal and Will, to make a stop for food around noon. Traffic had not been kind to them, and they've barely gotten to the point where they're seeing signs for Roanoke before Hannibal lets out a sound – a single, soft thing – and Will had sighed, muttered 'You're right', and pulled off the highway towards the first fast food place he saw.

Which happened to be a McDonald's. Of course. Hannibal eats a chicken salad without complaint while Mischa and Shannon wolf down what has to be their weight in chicken nuggets. They're getting stares, Mischa's bandaged neck and Shannon's broken nose and Hannibal's obvious limp, but no one has come over to bother them, yet.

Will himself is ravenous, and eats three cheeseburgers and everyone's fries while Alana pokes at her salad and eats slowly, likely finding it just as distasteful as Hannibal is. They are in a booth, Hannibal shielding Will, penning him in between the wall and everyone else, their thighs and hips and shoulders touching and it's Hannibal's injured side but he hasn't protested and has given Will no room to move away, so he figures it's a deliberate thing.

Mischa and Shannon have Alana between them, watching and guarding her like they would guard their brother. Will swallows, and looks down, unable to stop his pitiful whine escaping, which he tries to hide by taking a sip of iced tea.

Hannibal notices. His hand flattens over Will's knee, squeezes gently, and Will can't look at him otherwise he might lose it.

They haven't gotten any more phone calls from the Alpha that was using Margot's phone. Will and Hannibal, too, haven't gotten any messages. Somehow the radio silence is worse than being taunted – if they called him just to play him Adam's screams, at least that's something real. Something *incensing*. Something that could make his blood boil and his instincts rage. But this is…this is exhausting, the slow slip of hypothermia through his bones until all he feels is numb.

Alana clears her throat and looks to Mischa, offering a cautious smile. "I'd like to use the bathroom," she says. Mischa nods, stands, and lets her out of the booth, and then takes Shannon's hand and they both follow Alana into the bathroom.

Will does let out a sound, at that, a half-given sob that doesn't have enough air to properly form. His eyes water and sting, and his throat burns harshly. Hannibal's purr is soft, soothing, and Will puts an elbow on the table and covers his eyes with his hand.

"I swear to God I'm *this* close…"

Hannibal takes his other hand, laces their fingers together. He says nothing.

"If I didn't need to – to keep my head clear, if I wasn't pregnant, I'd have told you to leave me at a liquor store for an hour or two."

Hannibal sighs, quietly, and leans in to kiss Will's shoulder. "And I would have disobeyed you," he replies. Will turns, glares at him through watery eyes, and Hannibal offers him a small smile. "Anger is a good emotion, Will. It's powerful, one of the most powerful things a

human can feel. So, if you wanted to drink your sorrows away, I would have denied you, so that at least you had something to be angry at."

Will laughs, and then he's not laughing anymore. "I'm sorry," he says, and his knuckles whiten between Hannibal's. "I'm trying to – trying to keep it the fuck together. I'm trying."

"Your son is missing, Will," Hannibal says. "It's okay to…not have it together. Even a brief moment of weakness."

Will shakes his head, sharply, and wipes at his face. "No," he says, snapping the word. "No. I can't afford that right now." He was weak, before everything else. Before Italy, before Hannibal. Before Jack. He let himself be used and abused and strung along because that's what Omegas do and when his mind began to unravel he'd had to put his life, his trust, his entire being in the hands of a monster. He loves that monster, now, of course, but the fact of the matter is when Will Graham starts to slacken the reins on his mind, everything else follows and collapses like a Jenga tower.

"We're going to find them, and we're going to save Adam, and when we do I'm gonna show everyone what it looks like when you fuck with my family."

Hannibal is smiling, a viscerally proud light in his eyes, and he kisses their interlaced knuckles. "Hell hath no fury," he murmurs, and Will swallows, harsh, but doesn't argue. Then, Hannibal sighs. "Will. While our daughters are away, I did want to discuss the very real possibility that…it seems like your family is involved with this. In some capacity. In league with Margot Verger."

Will nods, blowing out a breath. "They didn't even go for the women," he says, and licks his lips, staring blankly at the crumbled up balls of paper wrap around each of their discarded meals. He frowns. "They only hurt Mischa so she couldn't fight. They hurt Shannon because she tried to fight – but Morgan. They went straight for Morgan. And they only took the Alphas. They could have taken all of them, but they didn't. Why?"

Hannibal's head tilts. "Perhaps a…certain need is satisfied, only through Alpha children."

"My family were traditionalists," Will murmurs. "They never really accepted my mother back into the family after his Alpha left and he remarried, but they were still there, pressuring him to sign me over to Jack when I moved. Jack became my legal guardian because they said it had to be that way."

"Protect the Omega," Hannibal says. "Preserve the bloodline."

"Right, except…. Except we didn't do that, did we?" Will says, and turns, meeting his mate's dark eyes. "You took me away, you 'brainwashed' me and forced me to become dependent on you." A flash of irritation makes Hannibal's lips thin, though it is somewhat playful, for he can hear just how much stock Will puts in *that* train of thought. "And we have children now, but they're strong children and I think…"

"Yes, darling?" Hannibal says, when Will falls silent.

Will closes his eyes, and sighs. "Of course," he mutters, and shakes his head. "Of fucking course. That's the whole point, isn't it?" He opens his eyes, and there is anger, now, a bitter and salted thing that has thorns and snarls in his chest. "They're traditional. They think Omegas should be given by the Alphas of the family, they think the Alphas are the only ones worth preserving. I'm a lost cause, 'used goods'." God, how often had he heard those words slung at his mother. The anger flares hot, molted. "There's no point trying to breed me out to someone else, and doing that would mean killing you which is still a waste of 'precious' Alpha blood. So…so they took Adam. Because he's Graham blood, which means he's worth saving."

It comes out as a rush and by the end of it, Will is furious – furious because he knows he is, at least partially, right. He looks at Hannibal and sees the same horned, angry determination. Agreement – the theory is sound.

Hannibal tilts his head. "Supposing that to be true," he says, not disagreeing, merely taking that single brick and laying it into the foundation, "then why would Margot be involved? Her family is less traditional than ours is – Morgan would be a target for them as well, with two mothers and no Alpha influence to speak of."

Will licks his lower lip, frowning. "I don't know," he says. Morgan isn't Graham blood, he isn't family. He's just a young Alpha with two mothers who bought Will's family land and now Will's family is getting involved again – maybe, *maybe*…

He swallows, and rubs a hand over his forehead, groaning. "I think the morning sickness phase is starting," he says.

Hannibal rubs up at down his back, gently soothes his palm across Will's nape to ease his tremors. "We'll stop at a pharmacy before we leave," he says. "I recall seeing a CVS, on the other side of the exit ramp when we came in."

Will nods, and puts his other elbow on the table, hiding his face in his hands. His stomach rolls uncomfortably, but it's not quite rising, yet, so he doesn't try and get up. He doesn't want to leave Hannibal's space, or his scent, or his strength. He turns his head and nuzzles Hannibal's neck, sighing.

"I want to make something clear."

"Anything, my love."

"If they are involved, I don't care in what capacity. If we go in a house, a cage, whatever, and Adam is there, anyone else in that room, in that place, is an enemy."

Hannibal tries not to purr. Tries, but can't hide it. Will smiles.

"They are…your family, Will," he says, though it's a meagre protest, defending some sensibility Will doesn't have anymore.

"No they're not," he replies, and takes Hannibal's hand, pulling it to his stomach. "This is my family," he says. "You are my family, and our children are my family. Everyone else is

just…"

"Cattle?" Hannibal supplies.

Will huffs, and smiles, and kisses Hannibal's neck. "Yeah. Exactly."

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> I'm sorry this took so long my loves! I have no excuse, but I hope you like where it's going :D

They cross the border of Louisiana just past nightfall. They come from the East and stop in Pearl River and check into a motel – Will too tired to argue with Hannibal about their choice of bed for the night, too exhausted and strung out. It's the kind of place where the notably wounded don't draw all that much attention, and Will hears no less than three police sirens as he gets them a room and they all pile inside.

"Chris' land is on the South side of New Orleans," he says, to no one in particular. "We'll be able to scope it out tomorrow."

The room has two Queens and a pull-out couch. Hannibal and Will take the couch, leaving one bed for their daughters, the second for Alana. They put her farthest from the door, so she cannot sneak out without having to pass all of them, though at this point Will doesn't think she would leave. Where would she go, besides?

For a while, it seems that his and Hannibal's shadows are attached. There is not a single moment where Hannibal is not touching Will, or breathing in his scent. The brief moment where Will had used the bathroom, when he'd returned, must have felt like an eternity for how suddenly and desperately Hannibal had embraced him.

They order pizza, no one willing to leave to fetch food, and Hannibal herds them all onto the pull-out couch, sits with his back to the wall and his eyes on the door, his injured thigh pressed to Mischa's, his other foot tucked behind Shannon's back. Will, next to him on his other side, Hannibal's arm around his shoulder. Alana is an odd stick-out point in their gathering, hunched in on herself. She's back to the dress she was wearing the night before, the clothes sagging and wrinkled. They all look like a mess.

After dinner, Hannibal changes and redresses Mischa's bite mark, his bullet wound – Alana's eyes go very wide at that – and he leaves only long enough to get a bag of ice, which Shannon presses to her nose as she pops more painkillers. Will hates every second, but forces himself to look, because this is his fault. This is his problem, his family, and if they are suffering, he must suffer with them.

Then, the women go to sleep. Will can't sleep. He's exhausted but he can't sleep.

Hannibal's shadow falls across him and Will lifts his head. Hannibal takes his hand, kneels by his shoulder, and kisses his knuckles – a gentle, formless shadow. The pull-out couch is

barely big enough to hold both of them and Will knows Hannibal is exhausted as well.

"You can have the couch, if you need it," Will whispers, thumbing gently under Hannibal's injured cheek.

Hannibal shakes his head, lets out a sound that is heavy and wounded. "I do not want to sleep," he confesses.

Will doesn't ask why. He knows. He sighs and sits up, all pretense forgotten, and pulls Hannibal up to sit next to him. He pushes his forehead against Hannibal's shoulder and lets himself be swept out and over into his mate's emotions. Hannibal's scent is perma-sharp with worry, with rage. Normally it is an incensing scent, something that lights Will on fire, but he's so tired, he's so tired and tense with strain and he just wants to relax. He wants to forget, for a little while.

Hannibal turns to him, resting his cheek against Will's hand. His hand rotates, fingertips pressing to Will's wrists, and Will shivers, heavy-lidded as he feels the triggered sense of calm flow through him, like cold from a frozen lake, into his bones.

But he jerks his hands, fights against the current after another second, and shakes his head. "No," he says, and Hannibal lifts his head to meet Will's eyes. "No. Don't -. Don't shoulder this all on your own. Don't."

Hannibal's eyes, in the darkness, are mere shadows in the hollow of his skull. He looks like death, not an avenging angel, but something cold and sad and inevitable. Like resignation and defeat, and Will aches to see it.

Hannibal's eyes drop, to Will's hands, and he stands after a moment and tugs Will to him. "Please," he says, and nothing else, and Will nods. His eyes sweep to the locks, checking and triple checking, then to the sleeping forms of his daughters, and of Alana. He follows Hannibal, and allows himself to be led to the bathroom. It is a small, dinky thing, with yellowish tiles and grout that bears more stains in more colors he has ever seen, even when he was a cop and did drug busts. Hannibal turns on the light, the fan coughing to life soon after, and closes the door behind them.

He turns Will and presses him against the wall, next to the small, square shower, opposite the toilet and the bathroom sink, and he kisses Will with vehemence and greed. Will shivers, always willing, always responsive, but he aches at his core because he knows this isn't lust, not real lust. This isn't desire – it is need, the need to feel Will under his hands, the need to remind himself that Will is here. The desperate, deep wounds seeking to be reopened, failure and fault branding Hannibal's eyes and he seeks to drown himself in Will's heat, to cauterize the wound before he bleeds out.

I had a sister and I lost her. I have always considered it my greatest failing. As an Alpha, and as a man.

Hannibal pulls back when Will whines, pawing at his mate gracelessly. Hannibal's eyes are heavy on him, a brilliant red, a desperate, ravenous shine to them when he meets Will's gaze.

"I'm here," Will whispers.

"I know," comes the reply, barely a breath. "In spite of everything – your past, your family, everything that should have thrown us apart, you are here." His fingers tremble when they touch Will's face, cup his cheek, achingly soft enough that it hurts. Hannibal breathes out. "Forgive me."

Will frowns. "There is nothing to forgive," he murmurs.

Hannibal shakes his head, looks away to the ugly yellow tile. "I was spared because I was an Alpha," he says. Will blinks at him, head tilting, and covers Hannibal's hand with his own. "My sister was…not so lucky. The men that took her away from me shared similar beliefs with your family."

Will stares at him. And suddenly, the visceral anger does not grow, it does not deepen, but it sharpens immensely in his eyes, grows layers and facets he was not privy to before. They had never discussed Mischa's namesake beyond Will telling Hannibal they would name their first daughter after his sister. It was a wound too raw, too scarred, to ever be touched.

But now it is ripped open, and now Hannibal is bleeding out.

He swallows, and digs his nails into Hannibal's neck, jerking him sharply enough that Hannibal must meet his eyes. Neither of theirs are dry, now.

"You slaughtered those men, didn't you?" he says, harshly. Hannibal nods, and where Will is claws, he is soft, so tenderly gentle with Will. Will knows his mate can be savage, knows he can harm – sees it, in his eyes, the desperate desire to do so. But he would never hurt Will, even in rut, even with Will in heat. "And we will slaughter these ones. We will have our revenge."

Hannibal's nostrils flare widely, his eyes sharpen, and his jaw clenches. He gives a single, short nod, and Will growls, showing his teeth, and wraps his hand around Hannibal's throat.

"Tell me how you'll do it."

Hannibal's eyes flash, a deep, dark red, and he lunges for Will, plastering him against the wall. His nails dig into Will's flanks, trapping him there – as if Will would ever run from him – and he snarls, lowers his mouth and touches his teeth to Will's jaw.

"I will not," he breathes, and Will shivers at the feeling of his warm exhale. Hannibal mouths along his neck, teeth dragging over the mating scar, and the raised lines and bruises he has placed to Will's neck – they are fading now, neither of them having touched each other like this for so long, too long -. "These are your kills, beloved. I will only take what you offer me."

Will growls, sliding his hands down Hannibal's shirt, to the waistband of his lounge pants. He dips his fingers beneath, claws at bare skin, wraps a hand around Hannibal's cock as it thickens in his hand. "Mischa gets the man who bit her," he whispers, feeling Hannibal shudder, rutting against his palm. "Chris is mine."

Hannibal snarls against his neck, his hands tightening on Will's hips. Will's forehead drops to Hannibal's shoulder, his breath catching at the scent of his Alpha as it changes – no matter his emotion, Hannibal's desire is a potent scent, and overpowers everything else until Will is filled with it; lungs, heart, stomach.

"You can have the man who touched our son."

At that, Hannibal growls, a deep and throaty thing, and pulls back from Will, turning him by the hips until Will is facing the wall. He plasters himself to Will's back and sinks his teeth into the nape of Will's neck, hobbling him and sending a sharp pulse of arousal through his body. Will whines, one hand covering his mouth to stifle his sounds, the other balled into a fist to which he presses his forehead as Hannibal tugs his lounge pants down, baring his ass.

Hannibal mounts him just like that, bites until Will bleeds and fucks him with harsh claws in his hips, keeping him still. It is not a time for gentleness, not a time for the avid devotion they normally show each other – it is primal, more basic than atoms and tides, as Hannibal's cock splits him open and Hannibal's teeth do the same.

Will moans, clenching his eyes tightly shut, legs spread as wide as he can get them. Hannibal pushes with all his weight, seeking to flatten, to smother, to douse Will in his scent and Will wants him to – he wishes they were on the floor, so that Hannibal could cover him completely, drive him into the ground and remind him from head to heart that his Alpha is strong, and powerful, and perfect for him.

The spill of Will's blood on his shoulder feels like initiation, like he's being drawn back into his family with his own wounds, and he aches for it. He drops his hand from his mouth and strokes himself tightly, teeth clenched and lined up on their edges as Hannibal growls and fucks him. One of Hannibal's hands goes to his hair, forces him tighter against the wall and Hannibal pulls his teeth back, kisses open-mouthed and sucking over the wound, his thrusts slowing as his knot starts to form.

"Please," Will whispers, as loud as he dares. "*Please*, Hannibal."

Hannibal goes still, snarling so lowly it's more sensation than sound, and he presses deep, rutting Will back onto his cock as his knot swells, locking them together. Will gasps, shivering, the fist on the wall flying to his mouth as he sags and finishes with a high-pitched whine. Hannibal holds him fast, arm around his chest, arm around his swelling stomach, and nuzzles the unmarked side of Will's neck as he trembles and pants against his hand.

Hannibal is shaking, too, his mouth planting warm kisses on Will's exposed neck as Will tries to get his knees to lock again, to take his weight. He tilts his head forward and to the side, giving his mate all the access he desires, and lets the wash of pleasure consume him. Lets Hannibal's touch placate, and soothe, lets it all sink away, just for a moment, like the sudden back draw of the ocean before a tsunami hits.

Hannibal sighs against him, and tucks his hands to Will, pulling him from the wall and letting him lean on the sink counter instead. There was once a mirror here, but all that remains are the corner screws and an outline of a rusted frame. There is a balled-up washcloth and Hannibal wets it in the sink, before he starts to clean Will's neck.

Will closes his eyes, hangs his head. His fingers curl on the edge of the counter and he stands, waiting, as Hannibal pets him and grooms him and they wait out his knot. The guilt and anxiety are easing their way back in like animals tentatively breaking into open land, ready to be speared and shot down. Hannibal is purring, now – that same forced noise, deeper than he can make genuinely, just doing it for the sake of Will's nerves, and Will swallows, and tries to force one of his own.

He can't. He *can't*. His knuckles whiten and he clenches his jaw, a soft hitch of breath giving way to a sob. Hannibal's knot deflates – too soon, *too soon* – and Will pulls his clothing back into place, turns to see Hannibal doing the same, and though there is no more water in Hannibal's eyes, his expression is a cold, fissured mask of anger, of similar pain. Will takes the washcloth from him and dabs at Hannibal's face, his neck, and lifts Hannibal's shirt to clear the edge of the bandage of his sweat.

He frowns, and tilts his head.

"They shot you," he murmurs.

Hannibal nods. "Yes."

"They…shot you as you were chasing them. Before or after you killed two of their own?"

"Before," Hannibal replies. Will swallows back a sharp stab of pride at that, and raises his eyes. "I was almost at the cars, I could see them…" He stops, and blinks, and breathes out. "The two I killed were still outside when I attacked. The rest fled, and shot at me when I gave chase."

Will's lips twitch, flatly humored at the idea of Hannibal chasing down a car.

"What are you thinking, darling?"

"Why didn't they shoot all of us?" Will whispers, his eyes on the bandage as he wipes down Hannibal's belly, the cling of Will's slick and sweat on him. "Why bring a gun at all? They had the manpower, they had the element of surprise. Or why weren't all of them armed?" He frowns, and shakes his head. "I don't understand."

Hannibal hums – not considering, but like Will's words have added another piece to his own puzzle. He thumbs at Will's jaw, tilts his head up so their eyes meet again. "I have some theories," he murmurs. "I may be wrong."

"Tell me anyway," Will answers.

Hannibal sighs, his eyes skating over Will's face as tenderly as his fingers, flattening along Will's cheek.

"Let us assume, for a moment, that everything we think is correct." Will swallows, and nods. "We will assume that your family have an investment in Adam's wellbeing and growth on his way to becoming an adult. Through their own logic, they have also deemed Morgan an acceptable target."

Will blinks, and tilts his head into Hannibal's palm. "So why take Margot?"

Hannibal smiles. "Why indeed?"

Will closes his eyes, considering. "Margot would have been the one to oversee the purchase of the land," he says, and frowns. "But Morgan's signature was on the contract."

"The Verger heir," Hannibal murmurs, stepping closer. He noses at Will's exposed neck, opposite his bite mark, and Will shivers. "I find myself thinking, often, about the exact nature of Morgan's conception. Alana doesn't seem the person to breed with the brother of her wife, donation or not."

Will nods, and thinks of the look they'd shared. "If Margot was in on the contract, that means she will have had to go down and look at the land. She would have talked to my cousins. That contract was signed in person." He shivers when Hannibal purrs. "Notarized."

Hannibal hums. "Perhaps she fought, too," he murmurs. "Perhaps she is as much a victim as our children."

Will opens his eyes, turns his head until they're cheek to cheek.

"Maybe they put a gun to her head," he breathes. Imagines it, clear as day, a man prowling into the bedroom and telling Margot to plant pillows and a wig, to creep silently away. Thinks of her shaking, gripping the door to the children's bedroom, opening it for them to come through. No fingerprints. No fear, when Morgan woke and saw his mother. He thinks of her spreading Vaseline on the handle and scuffing her shoes against the door to Will's nest, trying to make a sound that would alert everyone. Thinks of her coming down the stairs with a gun to her head and her child carried along after.

"But they knew where to find us," he says. "One of them must have told Chris."

"A devoted wife who knew the truth of her wife's nightmares. A misguided young Alpha, overwhelmed with traumatic stories told by his mother, whom he loves. Would you have not sought some sort of revenge, in their stead?"

"He kissed Adam," Will protests, meekly. "They wanted to stay the night. Margot would have never put him in danger."

"She called off the plan," Hannibal says, suggestive and soft. "But it was too late. The die had been cast. She thought they were safe."

"Didn't we all," Will says darkly.

Hannibal pulls back, a visceral shine in his eyes. He cups Will's face with both hands and brings him in for a chaste kiss, and lets out a low growl when they part. "We will see their slights against us paid a thousand-fold," he says, with such firm determination that Will shivers at the sound of it. He nods, strength renewed, and sets the washcloth down.

"Come lay down with me," he murmurs, shutting off the light and opening the door. He's not convinced, but that doesn't matter. The truth will be known soon enough. Hannibal follows,

pressed close to his back. "Even if you don't sleep."

"Of course, mylimasis," Hannibal replies; a soft purr. They both collapse to the couch, Will tucked in tight to the back cushions, Hannibal caging him and protecting him even from the dark. He closes his eyes, Hannibal's lips at his hair. Sleep does not come, but rest does, until sunrise.

When Adam wakes again, he is *freezing*. He trembles, shivering, and rubs his hands together, then across his face. The room is dark, but not in the same way the barn was – there are lights here, low like energy efficient bulbs, illuminating a plain cellar, cement on the floor and making up the walls. He tilts his head, rolling onto his back, and sits up.

He is in a cage. The bars go from the floor to the ceiling, and are as thick as his arm.

He is not alone.

He turns to one side, the scent of jasmine and lime exploding across his senses, and his eyes widen when he sees Margot, in a similar pen to his own. Her cheeks are smeared with makeup, her slender body curled up on itself. Her hands are wrapped around her shins, her head tucked down, exhaustion in every edge of slumped muscle. She is asleep, but twitching as though in the throes of a nightmare.

Adam frowns. Why is Margot here?

He hears a sound, and looks the other way, to see another cell, this one much smaller. His eyes widen and he gasps, crawling to the edge of it, and pushes at the limp body that has been dumped close to his own pen. He can reach through, and wraps one hand around one of the bars, the other rolling the body until it's on its back.

"Morgan," he whispers fiercely. The other Alpha has a bruise along his face, from his temple to his jaw, a smear of blood from a cut that looks like it was made by a pistol-whip or ringed knuckles. He nudges Morgan's shoulder again, gritting his teeth when it means he must push his shoulders up as tight to the bars as he can – but his persistence is rewarded when Morgan moans, lowly, his lashes fluttering and his head lolling to one side. "Morgan. C'mon, wake up."

Morgan groans again, and opens his eyes to reveal that sharp blue, ringed with red so it turns purple in the center. He winces, touching his forehead gingerly, and sits up. His scent is sharp, lime and salted with pain, and he grimaces and rubs a hand through his hair, taking stock of his surroundings.

"Where the fuck are we?" he demands.

"No idea," Adam replies. Though he knows, he is almost certain, that he is on the land his family owned before being purchased by the Vergers. Either that or his cousins have a lot of empty farms in the South. "I was hoping you could tell me."

Morgan winces, and looks at him. Then, past him, to Margot. His eyes widen. "What the *fuck*," he demands, and moves away from Adam so he can see her better. "Mom! Mom, are you okay?"

"She's alive," Adam says, looking over his shoulder. She hasn't stirred, maybe she's been drugged or sedated or whatever else. Whatever they gave Morgan and Adam to keep them under for the long drive.

Morgan blows out a hard, angry breath, and sits back against the cement wall. He licks his palm, absently grooming the blood from his face, and Adam sits beside him on the other side of the bars. He looks at Morgan, watches him, the narrowed sharpness of his angry eyes, the clench of his jaw, the subtle quiver in his shoulders like he wants to snarl.

"It's gonna be okay," he says.

Morgan snaps at him, "How you figure?"

"If they wanted to kill us, they would have done it already," Adam replies with a shrug. He shivers, pulling his legs up, rubbing at his shins. *Fuck*, it's cold down here. Maybe they're going to freeze to death. He laughs to himself, thinking of his father's stores, of the hanging carcasses and gutted meat. Wouldn't that be a lackluster way to die.

Morgan huffs. "You would know."

Adam frowns, and looks at him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's the whole point, isn't it? Your dad's a killer." Adam blinks at him, lips parting in shock when Morgan turns steely eyes his way. "This is some fucked up revenge plan or something, some bastard getting back at your family for what your father did."

Adam presses his lips together. Hears, in his ear, his mother whisper, "Careful, baby. You gotta play this careful."

Adam tilts his head, shows his neck, and looks forward. He hears Morgan's growl, his snap of teeth. "That's an interesting conclusion," he says slowly. "You're gonna have to walk me through how you got to it."

Morgan huffs. "Don't play dumb," he says.

Adam smiles. "If my family is the target, why did they take you, then?" he asks, slanting his eyes Morgan's way. "Why take your mother?"

Morgan glares, snaps his teeth together, and looks away.

In his head, Adam hears his father; "He knows something."

"Of course he does," his mother laughs. "The pretty ones are always scheming."

In front of him, a door opens, flooding the basement with light. Adam winces, growling and snapping his teeth together, glad to see that Morgan is doing the same – he can work with a common enemy. He stands, shivering with cold, and approaches the bars as Chris comes at the other side. The Alpha's smile is wide, off-kilter, just like his mother's is, and he folds his arms across his chest and looks Adam up and down.

Adam growls.

"Hey, now, there's no need for that," Chris says, and opens his arms wide. "We're family, after all."

"You're no family of mine," Adam replies sharply.

Chris tilts his head, his eyes flaring with Alpha red. "That's where you're wrong, kid," he says, somewhat coldly, his arms dropping. "Your mama may have spoonfed you some grade A bullshit with that manipulative bull of his, but you'll see the light soon enough. We protect our own, our bloodline, even if it has…unappealing origins." His eyes flash to Morgan, at Adam's side, and he smiles. "Every Alpha life is precious." His eyes move back to Adam. "You'll see, soon enough. You're a Graham, after all."

He tries to remember if he has ever been this angry before. In his head, his entire family is snarling. He steps close to the bars and wraps his hands around one on either side of his face, looks into Chris' eyes, and spits on the ground.

"My name is Adam *Lecter*," he snarls. "My father -."

"Is a murderer," Chris interrupts, his eyes cold. He leans in but Adam refuses to back down. He lifts his chin and shows his teeth. "A man who stole your mother away from a legal contract and bred him out like the bitch he is. If it weren't for your *father*, we would have had a strong pack of Alphas by now and two of my men wouldn't have been slaughtered like Goddamn pigs."

No, he has definitely never been this angry before.

"Careful, baby," his mother whispers.

"Go for his fucking throat," Mischa growls.

Then, behind it all, his father, black with rage. Adam's head is warm, too warm, suddenly, and when he blinks his vision colors the air too red. His snarl is loud and riotous and powerful enough that he thinks it might shred his throat by the time he's done.

"My father is the Chesapeake Ripper," he says, deadly-quiet. "And you better hope he's the one who finds you, because at least he'll make your death quick. My *mother* -." How dare he, how *dare* this son of a bitch speak of his mother, like he's nothing more than a common animal stolen away from the herd. "Well, my mother makes no such promises."

Chris blinks at him, and huffs.

"And that's if I don't get to you first."

Beside him, Morgan laughs, and it feels like agreement.

Chris snarls at both of them, looking like he's inches from opening their cells and beating the fear of God into them. He holds back, showing his teeth, his eyes all red, and he looks Adam up and down again. "Strong emotions in this one," he says, to no one in particular. "We'll see how you feel after a few days of rut."

With that, he leaves, and the door slams shut behind him. Adam shivers, suddenly so cold again, and he sags against the bars, but does not let himself fall.

"That was foolish," his father says, but he sounds proud.

"I don't care," Adam replies, out loud.

"Adam." That's Morgan's voice, and Adam turns to him blindly, growls and snaps his teeth together when Morgan's hand brushes along his arm. "Hey, hey. It's okay. Come here." Adam goes, helpless to resist, and slumps to the floor. He's sweating, feverish, so *cold*, and then Morgan's hand is on his forehead, petting his hair, and he lets out a soothing rumble.

"Guess you were right," Adam gasps, tilting his head up. Morgan could snap his neck, right now, be done with it all. He could, and he doesn't, and Adam has a fleeting, wild thought that maybe this is how his mother feels whenever his father touches him. The threat of violence, the trust in its absence. *Foolish*.

Morgan growls, lowly. "If it's any consolation, I wish I wasn't." A pause, then; "Is that true? That your dad is…?"

Adam laughs. It seems like such a stupid thing to hide, now. It hadn't mattered – Chris had seemed less offended by the idea that Adam's father might be a serial killer than the fact that his mother had been 'stolen' and mounted by someone outside the family's approval. He thinks of Doctor Greystone, his stomach clenches and a hard knot of anger tenses up in his chest.

"Yeah," he breathes. Morgan's other hand, wet with his spit, with his blood, slides down Adam's arm, back up, trying to keep him warm. "Yeah, it's true, and he'll find us, and when he does I'm gonna eat them all bloody *raw*!" He raises his voice for the last part and hopes Chris and all his friends hear it.

Morgan makes a low noise, something half between a purr and a rumble of anticipation. He is silent, merely petting Adam as he starts to shake in earnest, tries to keep him warm and settled. Adam is exhausted, tired to the bone, sick to his stomach. He's hungry and his teeth itch, he wants to *bite*, to chase something and feel its blood, its pulse, beneath his hands.

Then, after what feels like a century, Morgan says; "I'd like to join you."

Adam looks up, meets the other Alpha's eyes. Morgan stares back, unflinchingly, presses his lips together and says; "I want to understand."

Understanding. Isn't that the name of the game? Adam can't answer before another wave of nauseating cold sweeps over him, and instead he buries his face in Morgan's arm, and shakes, and whimpers.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> Guys, this chapter is 10k and a LOT happens.
> I want to warn for....homophobic language, implied correction/rape therapy, a lot of violence, and just Chris being really fucking gross (and also conversations about cousin incest).

Adam's mind is here and not here all at once. The cold sinks into his belly and his hands, makes him shiver and he aches for something warm to touch. He thinks he understands, now, why Alphas are so violent and savage with the need to fight, or to fuck, to lay their hands on their mates and sink their teeth, their cock, their nails into something. Blood would warm him nicely. A tight, hot mouth or slick hole would feel just as good, chase away the cold until he burns again and feels *alive*.

There's a hand in his hair, petting him, the bars of a cell pressed to his cheek and the soothing rumble of another Alpha in his ear. He shakes, and snaps his teeth together, and closes his eyes. The bars are strong, and thick, spaced too far apart for any item of clothing he's wearing to be wrapped around them and pulled together. He doesn't have a piece of wood to twist wet cloth with – if that even works, he only saw it in a movie once and has no reason to believe it really would – and the bars are too strong to give under a single point of tension.

"They'll have to let us out eventually." Morgan. That's Morgan's voice – he is speaking softly, muffled to Adam's fever-wet hair. Adam huffs, lifts his chin and noses at the other boy's bicep. His teeth itch and his upper lip curls back, licking along the seam of his t-shirt and tasting warm flesh. Dirty, but warm, lime-scented and sharp.

"What," he says, and thinks of his mother, "you think the best plan is to attack the full-grown Alpha after being kept in a cell for hours? No food, no water, with another hostage and one of us fucked up on rut?"

Morgan's fingers go still. "Rut can make it easier," he says.

Adam blinks, slowly. It feels like Morgan is trying to say something without saying it. Adam's father does that a lot, leading the conversation like tugging a string in front of a cat, encouraging it to give chase and play and hone its own hunting instincts.

"We have to save our strength," he says, and thinks of the first time he'd been locked in the trunk of a car. Remembers the disapproval on his mother's face, the edge of exasperation in his father's eyes when he'd said something that sounded so reasonable at the time. It still sounds reasonable.

"Save your strength?" his father whispers, just as amused as he was the first time. "And how did that work out for you?"

"You're only going to get weaker as the rut goes on," Morgan says, determined and cold. Adam whines, his spine trembling. He feels like there's an icicle where his spine should be, like he's going to drip drip *drip* into nothingness and melt into the floor, he'll be as useless and weak as a puddle before the end. He wants to, *needs* to run, to bite at something. His jaws part around Morgan's arm and the other Alpha jerks away with a warning growl.

His hand tightens in Adam's hair and Adam sags, clenching his eyes tightly shut, growls. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"Just…here." Morgan's hands leave him for a moment, and then there's a rustle of clothing, and then Morgan shoves something warm and soft against his teeth. It smells like him, and Adam snarls and bites down on instinct, his mouth flooding with saliva as the scent of Morgan's sweat and blood fills his mouth and rubs over the scenting palette along the roof of it.

He grabs at the cloth, his eyes opening, and sees that Morgan has shed his t-shirt, baring his chest. He's more muscled than Adam, still slim with youth but there is evidence of future girth, of strength, and Adam's chest feels very warm.

He works his jaw free, forces his teeth to part, and says, "Aren't you cold?"

Morgan smiles at him. "The cold is all in your head," he murmurs, and taps his fingers against Adam's temple. "It's just the rut. I'm okay."

Adam can't find it in him to reply. He bites down on Morgan's shirt again, tearing through it with his sharp teeth, and growls because it does soothe the ache in his gums somewhat, his jaw relaxing as he bites down.

Morgan sighs, runs a hand through his hair and then goes back to petting Adam's head, long, gentle strokes through his hair and down to the nape of his neck. His eyes are red, instinctively riled at the presence of another presenting Alpha, but there's no aggression in his shoulders or the turn of his mouth. "I'm so sorry this is happening to you, Adam."

Adam's nostrils flare, and he growls. He has only recently learned of his parents' past, but it doesn't surprise him that there are enemies here.

His father purrs in his ear, coaxing, another string trailed in front of the cat. "You know what comes next, my boy. This is not like your training. This captor of yours may keep you in here for far longer than your mother and I did."

Adam closes his eyes, and nods.

"And there are other hostages," his mother whispers urgently. "Is Margot awake?"

Is Margot awake. Adam opens his eyes, turns to look at her. She hasn't moved, but her twitching has quieted. He can't smell her blood – he doesn't think Chris hurt her, just

threatened her, maybe. This particular brand of supremacy doesn't believe in beating women and Omegas, just subjugating them. They are no better than breeding stock but breeding stock must be kept healthy to make strong children.

"They won't hurt her unless you make them," his father says.

Adam growls, internally. So he should do nothing? Remain passive and let them do whatever they want to him? To Morgan and Margot?

He hears his father laugh. Hears his growl. "Do not mistake practicality for heartlessness. You are allowed to be afraid. You are allowed to be angry. You are not allowed to be foolish."

Foolish. He has already been foolish. He cannot afford to be a second time.

He tugs Morgan's shirt from his mouth, works his jaw from side to side and hisses. "Your family and mine were the only ones who knew about the cabin," he says, and lifts his eyes to meet Morgan's. "What did you do?"

Morgan's eyes flash, and he looks away.

Adam's hand snaps out, wraps around his chin and forces Morgan to look at him. "What the fuck did you *do*?"

Morgan winces under his tight grip, but doesn't push Adam's hand away. He bears the harsh touch stoically, his nostrils flaring wide and his eyes thick with red. "I knew you'd come back," he says sharply. "I knew your family would come back, someday."

"What does it matter?" Adam demands. "We were no threat to you."

"Well I didn't *know* that, did I?" Morgan snaps, and jerks his chin free. Adam's claws leave sharp red lines on his face. "All I knew was my mom was having nightmares, that she'd had to go to therapy because of the crazy shit your dad pulled. And all I knew was I was being homeschooled because she was so fucking afraid of your family. I was taught how to defend myself, and I – I knew something was up. I searched anything and everything I could about *Doctor Hannibal Lecter* and *Special Agent Will Graham*."

Adam stares at him. It's hard to think beyond anything but the need to bite, that incredible cold sinking its claws into his belly again. "You did this," he breathes, and Morgan winces. "This is…this is all your fault."

"No," Morgan snaps, shaking his head. "No. I called it off. I told them to stand down. None of this…" He growls, raking his nails through his hair. "None of this should be *happening*."

"What do you mean?" Adam breathes.

"When I met you, I knew that I was…. I was wrong," Morgan says, and looks at him. He looks, suddenly, his own age again, soft and desperate and so young. "I saw my mother *smiling*, she was so happy to see Will and -. I didn't expect her to be. And your parents were so obviously in love, I knew I was wrong. And then…you…"

"Me."

Morgan shakes his head, his fingers curling. "I didn't mean for this to happen," he says softly. "I would have never done any of it if I'd known."

"Well it's happening now," Adam growls. "So what the fuck are you gonna do about it?"

"I…. Maybe I can talk to them," Morgan says. "Make them see sense."

"Didn't you hear a word Chris said?" Adam demands. "They think they *own* us. They want to fuckin'…bring us into the family. Forget our parents. They might hurt your mother, or breed her to one of the Alphas in the pack now." Morgan grimaces, growling. "Is that what you wanted? You want your mom scared out of her mind while he's married off to some nameless Alpha, your other mother worrying herself sick with mine?"

"*No*," Morgan replies. "No. I didn't want that. I don't want that. Look, I was stupid, okay? I acted like a fucking idiot and now your family is dealing with the consequences and I'm sorry, I'm *sorry*, but if we're going to make it out of this without drinking the fucking Kool-Aid we can't turn on each other."

Adam huffs, growling low, and bites into Morgan's shirt again in answer. Then, Margot stirs, suddenly, wincing as she lifts her head and rubs her hands over her face.

Morgan's breath catches. "Mom?" he whispers, and moves from Adam, pressing himself up tightly against the bars near the wall. His fingers wrap around it and the bars are just wide enough to fit most of his face through. "Momma?"

She looks up, her eyes widening as she takes in her surroundings, and she gasps at the sight of Morgan, bloodied and bruised. She moves to her own set of bars on the other side of Adam's cage, reaching out to him. "Morgan! Oh God, are you alright? What did they do to you?"

Adam snarls.

"Stay back, momma," Morgan says. "Adam's gone into rut."

Margot's eyes widen and snap to Adam, and she recoils as though he lunged for her, rubbing at her wrist. Her eyes are bright with tears and she looks around again. "Where are we?"

"The Graham farm, I think," Morgan replies darkly.

Margot's face goes through a myriad of emotions, before settling on confused terror. "The -? Why?"

Morgan glares down at his knees. "Chris Graham."

Margot lets out a soft, unhappy sound. "That fucking snake."

Adam growls, lifting his head and tugging Morgan's shirt from his mouth. "Cordell's dead," he tells her. Her eyes snap to him, she blinks rapidly. "Heard them talkin' about it. My father

probably killed him." She gasps, and covers her mouth.

"Your *father* killed Cordell?" Morgan says. He sounds more disbelieving than angry. Adam has never met the man, has no idea what he looks like, but from Morgan's reaction he can guess it would have been no easy feat.

He nods. "That's what they said."

"Oh, God," Margot whispers, running her hands through her hair. Adam watches her do it, watches her wince and pull, and her whole hairline moves before she straightens it. "Fuck." She takes in a deep breath, and wipes her hands over her face, before she looks at the two Alphas. "Okay. Well. Okay. This is…. I'm sure this is all just some fucked-up misunderstanding. We can work this out."

Adam's upper lip curls, his eyes sharp and hot in his head. His irises burn, and he thinks he might be showing red – he felt the same thing when Morgan kissed him, pressed him up to the outside of the bathroom door and put his hands in Adam's hair and kissed him like he was starving.

"There's no *working this out*," Adam snaps. "This son of a bitch might be my blood, but he isn't my family, and he came for us, hurt my sisters and my parents, and took me away from them. Took *you* and your son away from your wife, and it's *your* fault it happened."

Margot shakes her head rapidly. "No, that's not -."

"Mom, don't," Morgan sighs, heavy with despair. "I told him everything."

"And did you tell him we called it off?" she demands.

"*Yes*," Morgan snaps. "I don't -. I don't want to lie anymore. I get it, mom was scared, she was confused, but she was wrong. We were all wrong. I thought you understood that."

She doesn't answer.

Adam snaps his teeth together, lifting his chin when the door opens and Chris steps through. "Oh! Lady Verger, you're awake. Good," he says, and smiles, shaking his head with a false-sounding sigh. "I'm afraid I have some bad news."

"Cordell is dead," Margot says flatly.

Chris' eyes flash, and he looks at Adam. "…Yes," he mutters. "Terrible shame. He was a strong Alpha. I'd have seen him rewarded well for his help in uniting our family."

"You're not my family," Adam hisses.

Chris smiles at him, off-kilter and wide, and then his eyes slip to Morgan. He tilts his head at his state of undress, and then looks back to his shirt, still clutched in Adam's hands and wetted with saliva.

"…Huh," he says, sounding neither displeased nor happy at this new piece of information. He walks over to stand in front of Morgan's cell, his head cocked to one side. "You know, I didn't get a good look at you before, but I see some likeness now." He smiles. "You look a lot like little Will did at your age."

Adam frowns, and looks to Morgan. Sure, he has blue eyes and dark hair, but that's pretty much where the resemblance ends.

Morgan lifts his upper lip. "We're not related."

Chris grins. "Of course you're not," he says, clapping his hands together loudly. "But I know who your daddy was, Morgan. And if you're half the Alpha of his reputation, I think you'll be a good fit here."

Adam snarls, and stands. "You're not gonna fuckin' touch him."

Chris' eyes snap to him, and narrow. He growls and comes to stand in front of Adam. "Why the fuck not?" he demands, and Adam is shivering, feels weak, but he looks at Chris and wouldn't hesitate to lunge if there weren't bars in the way, foolishness be damned.

"I'll kill you if you do," he says.

Chris' eyes narrow further, and he bares his teeth. "What are ya, some kinda fucking faggot?" he snaps. Adam swallows, and lifts his chin. "God, the *one* Alpha my cousin manages to make and I get one that doesn't even look like him. Only thing you got from him is a craving for a knot, is that it?"

Adam doesn't let himself react, but in his head, his whole family roars with outrage.

"Figures," Chris spits. "Well, we can correct that, too." His eyes move to Morgan, then Adam, before settling on Margot. "Fix all three of you to the natural order."

At that, Adam snarls, and throws himself against the bars. Chris doesn't back away in time and Adam gets a fistful of his shirt, hauling him forward until he can get his other hand in Chris' neck. He claws at the exposed flesh, grinning when he manages to break skin – not deeply, but it will definitely hurt like a bitch. He tears into Chris' neck and thinks of how he'd torn through Edwin's body. It's much more satisfying, doing harm, when the victim is alive.

Chris throws himself back with a shriek, pawing at his bleeding neck and Adam snarls, mouth wet, and licks his fingers clean. "I'm going to kill you," he says. "I'm going to rip you limb from limb if my mother doesn't get to you first."

Chris snarls at him. "Your mother is a weak little bitch," he snaps.

"My *mother* is the most dangerous one in our entire family," Adam replies, and he knows this, he knows this deep in his bones. He knows it like hunger and gravity and the blueprint of his house. "And I know he's coming. He's going to come for me, pregnant or not, and God help you and all your *friends* who stand in his way."

At that, Chris abruptly freezes, his eyes widening, his lips parting. "He's…pregnant?" Chris whispers.

Adam blinks, and rears back. He doesn't like the look in Chris' eyes at all. "…No," he says, but it's weak. He's never been a particularly good liar.

"What the *fuck*," Chris snaps. "Still fuckin' breeding for that Goddamn bull. *Fuck!*" He turns away with a snarl and stalks towards the door. "Murray! Get the fuck down here *right* now!"

"Shit," Adam says, and clutches at Morgan's shirt, stepping back as the door closes behind Chris with a loud slam. He looks at Morgan. "You didn't tell him?"

Morgan's eyes are wide. "No," he says. "I didn't want them to…take him, too." He winces, and runs his hands through his hair. "Fuck. What are they gonna do to him?"

"I don't know." Adam's hands are shaking, for an entirely new reason now. Stupid, he was *stupid* to let that slip. Fuck. He collapses against the back wall, shuddering. If his mother is pregnant, that means he's still fertile, of course. What if they try and get rid of the baby and make him breed for one of the family's approved Alphas? What if he's pregnant with another Alpha – they'd rip the baby right from his arms, keep him caged until he gave birth and then tear them apart. Then they'd breed him off. Adam curls up on himself, sick to his stomach, heaving brokenly into Morgan's shirt.

Morgan knees down beside him, reaches out and touches his arm. "Hey," he says, and he's trying to soothe, Adam can tell, but it's not working. He's freezing and scared, so fucking scared – not for himself, but for his mother, and his future sibling.

Adam shakes his head sharply, shrugging his touch away. "If anything happens to him…"

"Your father is strong," Morgan says. "Your sisters are strong. Hell, your whole family is. Don't give up on them. They'll come for us."

Adam nods, once, weakly. "Right," he whispers. In his head, his family is silent.

"I haven't been here for years."

Will had been roused by another round of morning sickness, emptying his stomach into the bathroom toilet in the early hours of the morning. He's pale, feels sickly and weak, hadn't been able to stomach any food and beside him Hannibal is a quivering mess of anxiety. Will can taste it, and it isn't helping – he knows Hannibal is worried, on the very edge, both of them staring out from the side of a narrow road. Ahead of them, wide fields of grass, fenced-in for pasture animals that are no longer living there. There is a barn, and a house, both things unkempt in the way things are when they have been sold and will probably be torn down and rebuilt.

Hannibal reaches across the console and takes his hand. They are in the driver and passenger seat of Alana's car, Mischa, Alana, and Shannon pressed close in the backseat. They will not risk bloodying the rental.

The day is bright and clear, too happy for the mess of anxiety and visceral outrage in the car. Mischa and Shannon stink of rage, their eyes sharp on the barn as they glare from their own windows.

Alana shifts her weight and meets Will's eyes in the rearview mirror. "What are you going to do, Will?"

Will sighs, and shakes his head. "Whatever I have to," he replies.

Hannibal lets out a soft, unhappy sound, his lip curling back. "You're not going in there."

Will huffs, his smile sharp. "Yeah," he says. "I am."

Hannibal's hand tightens around his and he tugs, forcing Will to look at him. "You most certainly are not," he says, more forceful. He has a Voice, though he's not using it – he won't, until Will forces his hand, or Will relents. "Ignoring the obvious threats, the amount of stress and any potential physical strain on your body right now would -."

"Hannibal," Will says sharply. He forces himself to smile. "Forgive me, but I'm not going to risk the life of a child I've already raised for the possibility of one that doesn't even have a heartbeat yet." Hannibal's eyes are dark – he doesn't argue the sentiment, but there is definitely some part of him Will sees that rebels at the idea of Will rejecting *any* of his children, born or not.

"Mama." That's Mischa's voice, as she leans forward and wraps a hand around Will's bicep. "It's going to be dangerous, and we don't even know if Adam is *here*."

Will shakes his head. "He's here," he says, and pulls his hand and arm away from his mate and daughter. He leans forward and looks at Alana again. "You never came here, with Margot and Morgan."

Alana shakes her head and rubs a hand over her mouth. There is, in her eyes, something steely and resolved. Some acceptance that this will end bloody, one way or the other. Will wonders if she even cares anymore, or has been steamrolled with grief and worry like the rest of them.

Will knows he cannot wait a second longer. If he does, he will break, snap in two like a rubber band pulled too tight and rubbed too thin. They had come here with the intention of scoping out the place, measuring the perimeter and trying to get a look to see how many of them there were, if they could see Adam, Morgan, and Margot about.

But there is just silence. No movement. His fingers curl.

"Get out of the car," he commands, and unbuckles his seat belt and climbs out before anyone can grab him. Shannon lets out a protesting noise, but they all scramble out and Hannibal

circles the front of the car immediately, a hand flattening on Will's neck as though afraid Will might bolt.

Will looks down towards the barn, then turns to his mate. Closes his eyes and takes in a deep breath, and presses close to Hannibal's chest. Hannibal embraces him immediately, so tightly, like he might need to crush Will and hold him behind his ribs for safekeeping.

Will breathes out heavily, noses Hannibal's neck, and flexes his hands on his mate's arms, just above his elbows. "I need something from you," he says.

Hannibal pulls back and meets his eyes. There is a darkness in them – the same look Hannibal gave him the moment Will left his bed, to go to Jack and pretend to be something that he's not. Pretending to be sweet, and innocent, and the wrecked shell of an abused Omega. Hannibal's head tilts, and Will wonders if he looks the same, too, if there is another thread of understanding weaving itself between them.

Hannibal's fingers tighten. "You promised me that you would never ask this of me again."

Will swallows, and nods. "I know."

"Will, I can't -. I can't let you go in there alone."

"Why would he go in alone?" Shannon asks, appearing at her father's shoulder.

Hannibal sighs through his nose. "Your mother intends to flee to his cousins," he says. "To present himself as a runaway, seeking his family's help and protection, so that they let him inside."

"A fox in the henhouse," Alana murmurs.

Hannibal nods.

Will swallows, bows his head and runs his thumbs into the soft hollow of Hannibal's inner elbows, his touch gentle where Hannibal's is tight – not hurting, no ache yet, but he knows Hannibal is outraged at the thought of hurting him again.

"Can you do it?"

Hannibal growls. "You know I can."

Will nods. Wrong question. "Will you?"

Hannibal sighs, very heavily, and his fingers rub down the sides of Will's neck, as gentle as a summer breeze. When Will lifts his head and meets his mate's eyes, he sees Hannibal torn with indecision. Sees him battling with all his might against the instinct to protect, to defend – for it's the best plan. The only plan. Anyone aside from Will would raise alarms, conjure more Alphas and guns than their small troupe could overwhelm, and they would lose the element of surprise.

Will breathes out, the burning weakness in his throat and behind his eyes spearing him through, cracking him at the foundations as he clutches at Hannibal desperately. "Please," he whispers. "Please. Just do it."

Will has never had to ask Hannibal's permission for anything, Hannibal does not enjoy dominion in that way, but this feels dangerously close to it. Will can beg, if he has to – if he must fall to his knees and whine and cry for his Alpha, he will.

He cups Hannibal's face, his vision blurring, and says again, "Please, Hannibal. Let me do this."

Hannibal closes his eyes, pulls Will in and kisses him, deeply, an urgent hunger in him as he holds Will tightly and cups his head, wraps his other arm around Will's waist and crushes them together. Will kisses him back, just as eagerly – he needs Hannibal to know that he understands exactly what he's asking for. Just like he did all those years ago, he knows what must be done.

Then, Will pulls back, and Hannibal licks his lips and says, "Mischa. Shannon. Don't look."

Will swallows, braces himself for the first blow. Hannibal pulls him close again, noses at his neck and Will tilts his head, willingly bares it. Hannibal snarls, turns and pushes Will against the side of the car, and bites down hard enough that blood spills, hot and thick, down Will's chest. He grits his teeth, closes his eyes and tilts his head back, trying desperately not to let out a sound of pain. Without the endorphins of being placated or mounted, Hannibal's teeth are sharp and they tear, raising a harsh welt in the soft part of Will's neck.

His claws lift Will's shirt and dig into his back, raking down hard enough to raise red lines that make his muscles spasm and tighten, heightening the pain from a burn to an unpleasant sharpness. Will bites his knuckles, whimpers, and Hannibal snarls in answer.

"I love you, Will," he says, angry, low, his mouth wet.

Will nods, gasps as Hannibal bites him again, over his collarbone, shirt collar tugged down to expose pale skin. He cups his mate's head, petting through his hair with his free hand, and trembles as Hannibal's hands dig into his hips and lay a smattering of bruises.

"I love you too," Will breathes, panting, sweating, in so much pain he knows Hannibal can taste it. "I love you so much. Thank you. Thank you for doing this for me."

Hannibal growls, rises, and turns Will around. He pushes Will's hair up and bites the back of his neck harshly, sucks a blooming patch of purple-red bruising there. He does not touch Will's stomach, mindful of the growing life, but claws everywhere else.

His hands slide down, and Will turns his head, makes sure his daughters and Alana aren't looking. They are turned away, tense as stone, and Hannibal undoes Will's jeans and pushes his hands down them until he can grab at Will's thighs, and rakes his claws across the tense flesh. Will flinches, whining and glad that only Hannibal can hear it as Hannibal sighs, trembling behind him, and licks over the newest bite, sinks his claws into the innards of

Will's thighs, and the skin gives and Will sags against the warm side of the car, looking down to see a small stain of blood coloring the innards of his jeans.

Hannibal pulls his hands back and Will fixes his clothes, both of them trembling. There is no pleasure in Hannibal's eyes when he turns. His hands and mouth are red and Will takes one of his wrists, lifting it to his lips, and licks his fingers clean. Hannibal growls, cups Will's face with his dirty hand and smears his blood along his jaw.

He is shaking. They both are. Will lifts his chin and kisses Hannibal when he's close enough.

"Will," he says, and cannot say anything more.

Will nods. "We're going to get him back," he says. The first bite Hannibal laid is still bleeding sluggishly, his thighs hurt with an awful sting and his neck and back are torn to shreds, but he forces himself to smile when Hannibal meets his eyes.

Hannibal nods, closes his eyes, breathes out. "I know," he says, and he does sound assured, much to Will's relief. He knows by now that Will is just as much a capable predator in his own right. Omegas must, simply, use other means to hunt down their prey. Will can tug at the protective, righteous instincts of his family, spin a tale of abuse and violence, beg them for sanctuary and protection from his 'abusive' mate.

He can do it, and he will find his son and fall to his knees and thank his cousin for getting them to safety, before he tears them to pieces.

"I love you," Will breathes, emphatic and raw. Hannibal's eyes open again, and Will kisses him, sharing his blood between them.

Hannibal purrs, though it is weak, and kisses him back. "Do you have your phone?"

Will nods, patting his pocket. Hannibal pulls away and the women turn. Alana's eyes widen at the sight of him, her hand flying to her mouth. Mischa and Shannon wear similar expressions of anger and shock. They have never seen Hannibal hurt Will like he is capable of doing. Their love has been one of gentleness, timeless comfort.

"Mama," Mischa breathes, and her eyes shine with tears.

Will smiles at her, and then he meets Alana's eyes and sees them dark.

"This is what you did before," she says, acidic. "You…" Her eyes track to Hannibal. "You made him hurt you, and then ran to Jack and convinced him that -."

Will swallows, and looks away.

"Don't pretend I'm anything other than what I've always been," he says coldly. "I'm getting our children back, and this is the way it has to be."

Alana lets out a cry, throwing her hands up. "What did Jack do to you, Will? Why did he have to die?"

Will's mouth twitches in a smile. He looks to his mate, and kisses his shoulder, before he turns and begins to walk up the path to the house.

He has not been here in years, since he was a teenager. He remembers the first time, with his mother by his side, a hand around Will's shoulders and their heads ducked low, overwhelmed at the stench of Alpha. That, at least, has not changed. The scent of overly-sweet rut and sour milk permeates the air like a sickness, and Will tries not to breathe in too deeply. He forces his steps unsteady, works his nails into his own neck to get the blood to flow fresher, brighter, and then the door opens and Will falls to his knees.

"Holy shit." Steps run up to him – an Alpha Will doesn't recognize. He has short-cropped dark hair, deep brown eyes threaded with red, and a thick neck like an overfed rooster. Will paws at him, whining as loud and pitifully as he can, and lifts his head.

"Where's –. Where's Chris?" he asks, and flinches when the Alpha touches his back, both in revulsion at being touched like that and in real pain – Hannibal is a determined man, and capable of committing to a cause with direct, precise dedication. "He's my cousin. I need to see him."

"Chris!" the Alpha yells, raising his voice, and Will flinches and whimpers, but lifts his head when a new shadow blackens the doorway of the house.

Chris is taller, leaner than Will remembers, all puppy fat gone. His hair is longer, a little darker but still that sandy blond, and he stinks of an Alpha in rut. There are claw marks on his neck, and Will recognizes the scent of his son and forces himself not to growl.

Chris' eyes widen, and he approaches. "Will?" he says, like a demand.

Will collapses in on himself, clutching at his hair and making sure Chris sees the bruising and bites on his neck, the blood between his legs. He whines, all the weakness of his breed and the desperation in it that he can muster, knowing it tugs on an Alpha's instincts and forces them rabid with the need to protect and soothe.

A hand flattens over the nape of his neck and Will winces, but doesn't flinch. He is supposed to be comforted in the presence of his family. A hand cups his chin and lifts his face and Will meets his cousin's eyes.

"What the Hell happened to you?" Chris demands, too caught up by Will's display to pretend he doesn't care.

Will drops his eyes, whimpers again. "Alpha was angry," he says, and paws weakly at Chris' knee. "He hurt me."

Chris snarls, and lowers his head. "The baby?"

Will blinks, and tilts his head to hide his snarl. *Fuck*, so Chris does know he's pregnant. He flattens a hand on his belly and breathes in, turns his face into a mask of pained relief. "I escaped," he murmurs. "I didn't know where else to go. I'm sorry, Chris, I'm so sorry. I should never have left home."

"No," Chris says darkly. "You shouldn't have."

"I'm sorry," Will breathes. "He -. Alpha killed my pack Alpha, stole me away. I didn't know what else to do."

At that, Chris smiles, and it is a wide and unpleasant thing. "It's alright, sweetheart," he purrs, petting Will's sweaty and bloody hair from his face. "I know you didn't stand a chance against him. No Omega would – it's not your fault he made you spread your legs for him. Not your fault it took three tries to get it right – just proof that he wasn't good for you."

Will's stomach curls, knots up with outrage, but he keeps his face a mask of gratitude and relief.

Chris' smile widens. "I have something that'll make you feel better," he says, and stands, pulling Will to his feet by his hair. He wraps an arm around Will's shoulders and herds him inside, and his touch stings, his hands broad and too harsh on Will's tender skin.

He goes into the house, finds it hauntingly familiar and yet utterly foreign. There is still the case of hunting rifles, the ugly green carpet, the tasteless display of deer heads and animal skins tossed around the old couches with sagging cushions.

Will can smell Adam, here. Morgan, and Margot too. They're here, they've been here. Will's heart is racing.

Chris leads him towards the guest bathroom, pushes him in and closes the door behind both of them. He tuts, thumbing at Will's neck, and Will flinches with a soft, frightened-sounding whine. "Hey, it's okay. Not gonna hurt you," Chris purrs, but his eyes are red and there aren't any weapons in this room. Chris tilts his head, his gaze dark when he rakes Will up and down. "You sure did grow up pretty, Will."

Will swallows, drops his eyes, acts demure. "Thank you," he says.

Chris hums, and lifts his chin. "Gotta see how bad he fucked you up," he mutters. "Strip."

Will flinches at that, his eyes wide and his stomach tensing sharply with nausea. "What?"

Chris smiles. "You heard me," he says sharply. His arms fold across his chest and he leans against the door like he's waiting for a strip show. "Be a good Omega and take off your clothes."

Will swallows, and the way his hands shake is not an act. He shrugs off his coat, first, folding it and laying it down on the sink counter. He doesn't look at himself in the mirror, but his periphery gives him a look at his bloodied neck and his bruised throat. He pulls his shirt over his head, next, baring Hannibal's claw marks, his blooming bruises – both old and new.

Then – God, he's going to be sick – his jeans. He pushes his boots off and takes his jeans off, careful to make sure the bulge of his phone is hidden, leaving him in only underwear and socks. The room is cold, and stinks of Chris' hay-grass scent and he trembles, chancing a look over at his cousin.

Chris' expression is predatory and sharp, his eyes raking brazenly over Will's bare flesh. He growls, and Will swallows because he can smell Chris' arousal and it makes him nauseous, makes him want to brace himself over the sink and heave up more stomach acid and bile. If Chris fucking touches him he'll rip him apart, plan be damned.

He swallows, and drops his eyes when Chris' gaze lifts.

"You know," Chris says lightly, raising one hand and examining his cuticles. "Your mom and my dad wanted us to get together at some point."

Will doesn't think that's true for a second, and he shudders at the implications.

"You were fucking gorgeous back then," Chris adds. "All sweet and…skinny. I like you better now."

Will swallows, and looks away. Forces his revulsion not to show when he says, "Even with…?" He cups his stomach and gestures at his neck.

Chris hums, bites a cuticle free and spits it towards their feet. "Well, you still stink of him, but that'll go away eventually. And if that pup's an Alpha, he's family, just like your other boy." Will's gaze snaps up, and Chris smiles. "Would you like to see him?"

"Is he here?" Will breathes, wide-eyed.

Chris grins. "Of course he is, sweetheart," he replies with a purr. "You think I'd just leave him behind to that thief who took you away from me? He's family."

"Right." Will bites his lower lip, drops his eyes, swallows back the hard knot of disgust in his throat and turns to Chris. Touches him, lightly, on the chest, and lets his eyes grow wet and wide. "Can I -? Can I see him?"

Chris' lashes are low, and he purrs and cups Will's neck and it takes every ounce of self-control, every instinct in him beaten back, not to lunge for his throat. "Definitely," he murmurs. Will gives him a grateful, happy smile. It shows too much teeth, but Chris doesn't seem to notice.

Chris lets him go. "Get dressed," he commands, and Will hurries to obey, breathless with relief when he gets his clothes back on. "Can't have you wandering around with all my friends where anyone might just take one look at you and try to put their hands on you."

"No," Will says in agreement, nodding. "I know where I belong."

The words taste like acid.

Chris grins at him and opens the bathroom door, wrapping a hand in Will's hair and leading him out. In the main room there are Alphas, now – six of them, not including Chris, just like Hannibal said. "Boys, looks like Will found us all on his own!" he says, happily. "He's finally seen the light and has come home."

One of the Alphas, the one who first saw him, lifts his chin. "His Alpha won't be far behind."

Chris waves his hand in a dismissive gesture. "I'll rip the bastard's heart out myself," he says, and Will smiles. That sounds like a perfect way to die. He imagines his hands deep in Chris' chest, imagines tearing it out with nothing but his teeth and his claws while it still beats.

Chris tugs on Will's hair and leads him to another door. It opens, revealing a staircase and a second door, at the bottom. Will breathes in deeply and can taste Adam in the air. He whimpers in eagerness, and Chris laughs and lets him go.

"Go on, sweetheart," he says, and Will thinks he's either very stupid or very confident. He thanks his mother, not for the first time, for getting him the fuck out of this place before they got their claws in him before.

The door opens, and Adam is roaring. He whirls in place, ready to lunge for the bastard who took him again and tear him to shreds. His mind is hot and hazy with rut, he feels like everything is red, a color filter plastered over the world that demands blood and something sweet to soothe his teeth.

He freezes in place when he sees, not Chris, but his mother.

"Will?" Margot gasps, standing and going to the bars.

His mother looks at her, and it shows his neck and Adam snarls, grabbing at the bars. "Who did that to you?" he demands.

Blue eyes snap to him, widen, and he rushes forward, and Adam's snarling abruptly stops, soothed to purrs when his mother's gentle hands cup his face, smooth over his forehead. He sobs in relief, but it is also not relief, because if his mother is here then -.

"Where's dad?" Adam whispers.

There is a soft noise, a soothing purr, and lips on his forehead. "I don't have a lot of time," his mother whispers, and he's speaking in Italian. Adam blinks, frowning, his rut-addled brain trying to parse together the soft words. Then, something hard is pressed into his hands and he frowns down at his mother's phone. "Call your father and tell him there are seven Alphas here in total. All in the house. Tell him everything you know and everything he needs to know."

Adam swallows, breathes in. His mother's scent is so sweet, minty, and yet sour with anxiety like adding lemon juice to hot water. He whines, and lifts his head, and receives a kiss on his cheek and a gentle tug in his hair.

"Will, why the fuck are you here?" Margot asks.

She is ignored. Adam lifts his chin when gentle hands cup his face and he meets his mother's eyes. "Call your father, baby," he says, still in Italian. "He's waiting for one of us to call him. Your sisters, too. We're getting you out of here."

"Mama," Adam breathes, reaching out and tugging at his shirt. He stinks of Chris. Adam doesn't understand – who bit his mother? Who left these terrible marks on him? Why is he *here*?

Perhaps this is another dream, another hallucination. But no – the phone feels real. His mother's scent feels real. He can't *think* and -.

"Morgan," his mother says, looking to the other Alpha. "Make sure Adam calls his father."

Adam doesn't see Morgan nod, but hears him say, "I will."

Another nod. Another kiss to his forehead. "You'll be alright, baby." Another pet through his hair and Adam whines, weak, he's so fucking *weak* and -. "It won't be long now."

Then, the touch retreats, and Adam cries out and grabs for him but his mother is out of reach. "Mom!" he yells, and his expression is pained, that red haze making him look sickly and sallow and Adam can *help* him, he just wants to reach out and soothe his distress. He can make it better. If dad's not here, it falls to him to make it better.

Then the door opens and closes again, and they are alone, and Adam blinks down at the phone in his hands and can't quite remember how it got there.

"Adam," Morgan says, his voice sharp. Controlled. Adam looks at him and can't quite focus. "You gotta call your dad. This is our chance."

Right. Right. Call – he has to call his father. His fingers shake from cold as he unlocks the phone and pulls up his father's name. He blinks, and swallows, and almost drops the phone as another wave of rut overtakes him.

"*Adam*." Adam's head snaps to the side, his eyes wide, and Morgan is reaching out to him. "Give me the phone."

Adam's head is throbbing, but he obeys. "You…. You have a Voice," he breathes, weakly.

Morgan nods, his expression cold and determined. "Courtesy of my mother's paranoia," he says, and looks at Margot briefly, before he presses 'Call' on the phone and lifts it to his ear. "Certainly paid off."

Adam doesn't understand. He can't *think*.

And then Morgan straightens, and puts the phone on speaker, and his father's voice comes through;

"Will?"

"Dad," Adam breathes, and he needs to go to the source of it. His father is strong, is safety and comfort and control. He'll know what to do. "Dad, I -."

"Adam." His voice is heavy with relief. Then, in Italian; "Where is your mother?"

Adam shakes his head. Where is he? Where *is he*? "He gave me the phone," Adam replies, also in Italian, though his tongue feels dumb and heavy when he tries to form the words. "They were -. They hurt him, dad. There were bruises all over his neck."

There is a pause, and then his father says; "How many are there?"

"Seven."

A soft curse. "Where are you?"

"A…basement, I think."

"Good. Stay there. We're coming for you."

"Dad," Adam whines. "I can't -. I'm…" He growls, slams his hand on the bars of his cage. "I can help."

At that, his father purrs over the phone, and it's a settling sound. So unlike Adam expected the presence of another Alpha to feel like. He does not snap at his father's voice, doesn't want to hurt him, or Morgan. He does not see enemies, but allies – at least for now, united with a common goal.

"You will have your revenge, I promise," his father says, stereo surround, in his head and on the phone. "We're coming."

"Hurry," Adam breathes.

The call ends, and Morgan hides the phone quickly in the pocket of his sweatpants. Adam snarls, slamming his fists against the bars again, and shakes his head sharply.

"They're coming?" Morgan asks.

Adam nods. But… "I'm not just going to sit here and *wait* while my family risks their lives," he says, very softly. He looks around, trying to find anything he can use, anything at all, to try and get the bars apart. He tugs on each one, testing their strength and snarling when they do not budge. The door in the front of the cell is thick, iron-framed.

"You need a key," Margot says. "You can't just break out of a cell."

"Well what the fuck other option is there?" Adam demands, glaring at her.

She sighs, heavily, through her nose, and drums her nails against the bars, staring out to the door.

"We just have to wait," she says.

"No! I'm *done* waiting. I'm done just sitting here and feeling like I'm losing my fucking mind! My *mother* is up there with all those *monsters*, and my father is…he's coming, but there's only four of my family and there's *seven* of them, and they could…"

He sags against the bars like they're the only things holding him up. His head burns, so brightly, too brightly, and he doesn't know if he's going to scream or cry first but he has to do *something* because this waiting, this restlessness, is going to drive him insane.

"We never covered this," his mother's voice whispers, cutting through the red haze. "I'm sorry, baby."

"The trunk of a car and a cage are not so different," his father murmurs. "Look, Adam. What do you see?"

Adam breathes in, forces his eyes open, and looks down at the bottom of the bars. Then, up. His head tilts. There's a dark spot at the corner of his and Morgan's cell – water damage? Maybe. He goes to it and gestures for Morgan to come to him.

"Give me a boost."

Morgan cups his hands and Adam fits his foot into the stirrup, gritting his teeth and using the bars to hold him as Morgan lifts him until Adam's head is almost touching the ceiling. He reaches up and hooks a leg around a bar, and touches, gingerly, at the very top of the corner one.

It's wet. It's crumbling, not cement but something that breaks under his fingers around the top of the bar. Incensed, he digs his nails into it, growling as more wet, dirt-like material falls onto his face and shoulders. He splutters, spitting it out, but keeps working.

Morgan huffs beneath him. "The fuck are you doing?" he grunts, pressing his forehead to Adam's thigh as Adam digs at the wet spot. Until his nails bend back, until his fingers bleed.

He huffs, and taps Morgan's head to let him down. "Give me the phone," he says, and Morgan hands it over, then lifts Adam back up and Adam uses the corner of it to tap at the loose rock, stone, and cement. The phone screen cracks and breaks, his fingers slick on the corners of it, but he manages to get enough of it free that the entire back half of the pole is exposed.

He climbs down again, takes Morgan's shirt, wet with his saliva, and ties it in a knot around the bar, as high up as he can reach.

Then, he puts his heel to the next bar over, wraps the edge of Morgan's shirt in both fists, and pulls. Puts all his weight behind it, and then Morgan has his hands wrapped in the shirt too and is tugging. They pull, snarling and shaking with effort, until the bar starts to creak and, suddenly, is unmoored from the top of its post.

Adam grins, panting, victorious. He wiggles it free and there is a small lip where the ceiling is just a little higher, and he lifts the bar and it comes out at the bottom as well. He sets it to

one side, mindful of making too much noise. "Well done," his father says in his ear. "Very well done."

With the bar removed, Adam can turn to the side and squeeze his way through the corner two, and then he's free. He gasps, eyes wide, hardly daring to believe. He's *out*.

He hears Morgan grunting, and turns to see the other Alpha wriggling his way through the opened corner of his own cell. It's a tighter fit for him, but he manages, his forehead shining with sweat and his breathing heavy.

Adam grins at him, and Morgan smiles back.

They look to Margot. "You can wait," Adam says. She presses her lips together, obviously not happy with being left behind, but there's nothing they can do for her in here, and they're running out of time.

Adam turns to Morgan and holds out his hand. "Are you with me?" he asks.

Morgan's eyes lower, then lift. He meets Adam's, red-threaded blue, cheeks flushed with exertion, jaw clenched up like he wants to snarl. But he nods, and clasps Adam's forearm in a gesture of alliance. Adam nods, and they share a smile, and then he turns and heads for the door.

There is whiskey – "None for you, pretty boy, not until you're empty again". There is laughter, and raucous shouts as the Alphas bask in the pack victory of securing two young Alphas and an Omega back into the fold. It is a primitive thing to celebrate, and Will's stomach and chest are tight with nausea that he hopes, if it becomes too much, he can pass off as morning sickness.

His eyes keep moving to the door.

Chris notices, and throws an arm around Will's shoulder, settling beside him on the sagging couch. "You seem distracted, sweet thing," he purrs, petting through Will's hair, and Will growls inwardly, and thinks it will take a hundred showers and Hannibal touching him nonstop for days for him to be rid of Chris' scent.

He doesn't show his distress, except to knead his thighs and let out a sweet, frightened whine. "I'm just worried," he says, and looks Chris' way with lashes lowered. "He was so angry. I'm afraid he'll have followed me here. That he might try and hurt you."

Chris grins. "Oh, that's cute," he says, and touches Will's jaw. "He's really that scary, huh? One Alpha against seven is pretty daring. Or maybe he's just stupid."

Will presses his lips together so that he doesn't smile. "Maybe," he replies, and forces himself to relax in Chris' arms, to turn and nuzzle his shoulder. He sighs, and flattens a hand over his

stomach, listening to Chris purr. It feels awful, it feels sick, and Will hates every single second of it.

A shadow passes behind the back window. Will sees it. He doesn't think anyone else does.

He turns Chris with a finger to his jaw, making sure Chris doesn't see. "Are you really going to eat his heart?" he says.

"Would that make you happy?" Chris answers. His eyes are red, through and through.

Will's smile widens. He leans in and nuzzles Chris' throat, and can't believe Chris lets him. Alphas are so *stupid*. "You know what would make me *really* happy?" he whispers.

"Tell me, sweetheart."

Will hums, and pulls back, as the front door opens. "Watching my real family tear you limb from limb."

Chris blinks, and then his eyes widen, and the door to the basement opens as well. Will turns, shocked despite himself to see Adam and Morgan emerge from the basement, just as Hannibal, Mischa, and Shannon pour in from the front door.

"What the *fuck* -?"

The closest Alpha is killed instantly, a snap of Mischa's hands around his neck and a quick twist sending him to the ground. The second falls under Adam and Morgan, both young Alphas lunging for him and tearing him to shreds. Will moves quickly, and yanks on Chris' hair, forcing him to the floor between Will's feet. Chris bellows in rage, swiping at Will with sharp claws, and Will grits his teeth and tugs, forcing Chris' head to one side.

He puts his teeth to the Alpha's exposed throat and snarls; "If you know what's good for you, you'll stay fucking still." Chris snarls, tries to claw at his neck and his hair, and in answer Will wraps his free hand around the Alpha's neck and squeezes, until he feels delicate blood vessels bursting and feels cartilage on the verge of collapse. "Stay fucking still," he snarls, and uses his Voice.

Chris sags abruptly, gaping like a landed fish. Will smiles to himself – he knows Alphas like Chris would never *dream* that an Omega would be given his own Voice. They would have assumed Hannibal is like them, wants his mate barefoot and pregnant and a slave to his will.

Adam and Morgan go to a second Alpha, blood on their faces and hands as they lunge for the second one. Will smiles, proud as all Hell to see his son so capably tearing a man's throat out, Morgan ripping at his head so that Adam's teeth can sink deeper. They really do move well together.

Mischa brings her knee to an Alpha's stomach, making him bow down and clutch at his gut, and then Shannon grabs his head and snaps his neck and he slumps over the other bodies. There are only two left, besides Chris.

One of them snarls, rising to his feet, and lunges for Hannibal, but is quickly taught how foolish a mistake that is. Hannibal snaps his arm at the elbow, at the wrist, with sharp, precise movements, and then sinks his teeth in the man's neck as he howls – just like Alphas, Will thinks, to always go for the throat.

Chris lets out a gurgling little gasp, and Will smiles, teeth at his cousin's ear;

"I know what you're thinking," he whispers. "I think he looks beautiful, too."

Chris shakes his head sharply, and Will growls and tugs on his hair.

Then, there is the cold sound of the hammer of a gun cocking back, and Will freezes, feeling the muzzle of it pressed to the back of his head. He lifts his eyes and meets Hannibal's, sees him staring at Will, mouth and chest bloodied, and then his eyes move upwards to meet the Alpha standing behind Will and Chris. He lets the body of his own victim drop.

"No one fucking move," the Alpha snarls. "Or I'll blow this bitch's pretty brain to pieces."

Mischa hisses. His daughters look in much better shape than the men – the Alphas bloody and shining with it, the women more covert, quicker, less graphically violent. A fitting metaphor for their natures, Will thinks.

And what is an Omega's nature?

Both. And neither.

Manipulation.

There is a gunshot. Will smiles, and lifts his head when the Alpha behind him falls, and Hannibal turns to follow Will's sightlines. Alana is at the front door, a smoking gun clutched in both hands, her eyes dark and her jaw clenched tightly.

She lowers the gun, and Will lets out a purr. "I didn't know you still had a gun," he says.

She swallows. "I got a new one…after Jack."

Will smiles. "Thank you."

Alana nods, and her eyes scan the room, land on Morgan, and her whole face softens with relief. "Oh my God," she says, and runs to him, wrapping him up in a tight embrace, uncaring for the blood on his chest, his mouth, his hands. She clutches him tightly and kisses his cheek. "Where's Margot?"

"Downstairs," Morgan breathes. "We couldn't get her out. She's okay."

Alana is crying, her scent thick with relief.

Will meets Hannibal's eyes, and smiles. "See? Nothing to worry about."

Hannibal's mouth twitches. It might be a snarl. Might be a smile.

"So," he says, and his eyes drop to Chris with such utter disdain that even Will shivers. "This is your cousin, I take it."

Will hums, and puts his cheek against Chris' hair. "Don't you see the family resemblance?"

Hannibal huffs. "I'm afraid, darling, that the idea of something as beautiful as you and as ugly as him being cut from a similar cloth is one which I cannot reconcile."

"He's a fucking waste of blood," Adam spits. His eyes are very red, he's quivering in place. Still in rut. Will's nostrils flare, scenting him, and he bites back a soft sound of worry. "He said -. The things he said…"

"I'm sure they were all very unpleasant, if he spoke to you in the same way he spoke to me," Will murmurs, swallowing back another wave of nausea as he remembers the way Chris had looked at him. The touch on his face, the rake of his gaze and that *lust*. He lifts his head. Tilts it. Looks at Hannibal. "He told me he was going to eat your heart."

Alana shudders, pulling back from her son. She wipes at her face and, on a table beside the couch, there are keys, coated with an errant spray of blood. She grabs them, takes Morgan's hand, and they go towards the basement.

Hannibal growls, and steps forward. "An honorable way to die," he says. Chris tenses up under Will's hands, his heels kicking at the slick floor and that ugly carpet, colored skewbald green and red like Christmas.

Will meets his eyes. Swallows, his fingers flexing around his cousin's throat and in his hair. He is not plagued with indecision, his heart is not soft to his cousin's frantic whimpers, but; "He's not worth it," he murmurs. "Not worth a good death. He's lower than meat. Lower than *cattle*."

"Fuck you," Chris hisses, his voice hoarse. He shows his teeth at Hannibal and snarls. "Fuck you and your dirty offspring and your fucking *whore* Omega."

Their children lets out loud, angry sounds of anger, and Hannibal tilts his head, the red in his eyes the only thing giving away his outrage.

Adam is not so calm. "I fucking *told* you. Say *one more* thing about my mother and I swear -."

Mischa reaches out and touches Adam's arm, shaking her head.

Hannibal's jaw clenches, his fingers flex, and he looks at Will. Their eyes lock, and then Hannibal smiles, and crouches down in front of Chris. He reaches out and thumbs at the other Alpha's chin, forcing him to lift it and expose more of his neck.

"Perhaps," he says, drawing out the word, "we should put it to a vote."

Mischa, Shannon, and Adam are slowly prowling forward, all of their expressions black masks of anger, of anticipation. Will smiles, and meets his children's eyes in turn. Then, Hannibal's again.

"A fine idea."

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> I'm sorry this took so long, darlings! I was having some more anxiety problems, what's a girl to do xD

The stench of bodies is a cloying, seeping thing into the room. Will eyes his children, and Hannibal, and Chris' breathing is heavy in his throat, like the cartilage in his neck is beating itself against the palm of Will's hands, his blood leapt up and trying to escape and run free.

Adam snaps his teeth together. "I want his fucking heart," he demands.

Mischa and Shannon are nodding. "There aren't enough deaths in the world for someone like him, mama," Mischa whispers. Will can't find it in himself to disagree. But there is this: Chris is family. By rights, Will should be the one to kill him. He is a challenging Alpha – by rights, Hannibal should be the one to kill him.

He is a captor. By right, Adam should be the one to end his life.

He sighs through his nose, and shakes his head. "This is too big for just me," he murmurs. Hannibal steps forward and kicks Chris' heels apart, crouches down and plants his hands on his thighs, wide and large, nails digging in. There is still blood on his hands.

"Adam, my son, come here," Hannibal says, but his eyes are on Will. They burn, a brilliant red of fresh blood, none of the whiskey-brown, none of the warmth. It is heat and ice as one, mixed together to make Will tremble. He has never thought Hannibal more beautiful, more righteously lovely, than in this moment.

Adam approaches and Hannibal leans back and gathers him close, turns him so Adam sits in front of his father, facing Chris. Hannibal smiles, leans in and rests his chin over Adam's shoulder. Adam is trembling, a red-eyed mess just like his father, *Christ*, they look so alike, and Will wonders if this is what Hannibal looked like when he tracked down the men who killed his sister.

"You remember how to cut?" Hannibal murmurs, nuzzling Adam's hair. Unlike most Alphas his age, especially those mindless with rut, Adam does not snap at his father, does not bristle and growl. Rather, he turns his head and lowers his lashes in acknowledgement, a soft purr of affection and respect rumbling his thin chest. "The way your mother taught you?"

Adam blinks, his eyes lifting, and he looks at Will. Looks, and leans in, braced on Chris' chest until Will can lean forward and kiss his forehead. "Along the belly, below the ribs, right?"

"Right," Adam murmurs, and nods. He sits back and Will jerks Chris' head up and to the side, exposing his throat. Chris snarls, his legs coming up and trying to kick at Hannibal, but Hannibal holds him still, a snarl of his own spilling from his lips.

And then, Shannon on one side, Mischa on the other. They kneel over Chris' hands, grab his arms and hold him down, and Shannon hands Adam a long filleting knife.

"Make it last, little brother," Mischa says, and leans in and nuzzles Adam's neck. Adam shivers, his eyes red, so red, and wide, and he looks at Chris.

"Hey, hey, no!" Chris yells, trembling in place, flinching back to the couch, but he cannot go far, for Will's family are on all sides, close and hemming him in, and there is no escape. There was never going to be any escape – he was dead from the second he decided to rise up against them. "Please, hey, kid, c'mon, you don't need to do this."

Adam cocks his head to one side, and his lips twitch like he can't decide to smile or to snarl. He settles on Chris' thighs, a strangely intimate position, and looks down at the knife in his hands. His brow creases, like a heavy swing, the pendulum of indecision.

"You're not a killer," Chris whispers. "Just 'cause they tell you do to something, you don't gotta do it. You don't need to."

Adam hums, and lifts his eyes again. Tightens his grip on the knife and leans forward, cups the back of Chris' neck and rests their foreheads together.

"I know I don't need to," he says in sweet reply. "But I want to."

He plunges the knife deep, shuddering at the feel of hot, slick blood flowing out and coating his hands. It feels *good*, the warm gush of it, the way Chris' eyes widen and brighten with tears of reflexive pain. The way his chest seizes up, expands wide, and he convulses against the rest of his family. Adam is purring, and finally he is so *warm*, it feels so good to kill and take the life from someone who deserves it.

He drags the knife across Chris' belly, slow, achingly slow, growling as his blood and guts pour out in a slick, thick mess. He leaves the knife buried in his side and smiles, closes his eyes, and pushes his free hand in. Chris is burning hot on the inside, his choked groans and gasps a lovely chorus of pain, and Adam reaches up, past stomach, past liver and under ribs. Through the diaphragm and between the lungs and it feels like the sweet slip of someone's lips against his fingers, until he finds the frantic, bulging muscle of Chris' weakening heart.

Adam smiles, and lifts his eyes to meet those of his mother, finds them blue and gold. He has blood in his mouth and he looks at the cuts and bites on his mother's neck, the shine of his own reflection in pupils blown wide.

"Did he do that to you?" Adam asks, and nods to his mother's neck.

A smile. "Does that mean a lot to you, baby?"

"I'll kill him slow if he did."

At that, his mother laughs. "He's already dying, Adam. Finish it, so that we can all go home."

Adam nods, and wraps his fingers tight around the beating heart, digs in with claws, grits his teeth, and tugs. He is starving, and finally so warm, and it requires no thought, there is no hesitance, as he lifts the heart in both hands, lets his cousin's limp neck go, and bites down into the rounded flesh of an atrium. The aorta is wet with blood and spurts down his chin, and Misha snarls at his side, and grabs the knife, tearing open Chris' shoulder and eating a strip of flesh from the blade like an apple slice.

Will watches his children eat, with neither revulsion nor jealousy. Let them feast, they have more than earned it. He sits back and pulls his legs up on the side of the couch, moving away from the convulsing mess of flesh his cousin has become. His shoes and the lower legs of his jeans are soaked with blood. He presses his back to the side of the couch, keeping watch at the basement door and at the front door while his children feed to their hearts' content on their abuser.

A hand in his hair startles him, and Will lifts his head and sighs when Hannibal crouches down beside him. The Alpha is silent, and pushes his nose to Will's clean neck, his other hand cupping Will's throat and ridding him of Chris' scent. There is something shocked and possessive in his touch, as though hardly daring to believe that Will survived on his own in here. But he should have known better - Will is a survivor, a puppeteer like no other, and Hannibal knows this. He proved it the night they truly became one, and became free.

Will turns to him and falls to his knees in front of Hannibal, wrapping himself up tightly in his mate's chest as Hannibal embraces him with trembling hands, and lips to his hair. "You're alright," he whispers, and Will closes his eyes and pushes his forehead to Hannibal's shoulder, and only goes still when Hannibal rubs a hand over the nape of his neck, placating him. "Your children are alright. I'm alright. We're all going to be okay."

Will nods, or tries to nod. He turns in Hannibal's arms and watches as Adam splits what remains of the heart in two and feeds it to his sisters, before he starts on Chris' neck. They are all soaked in blood now, feral beasts of conquest and ravenous hunger. The pool of blood is almost at the basement door.

"You should share in this kill," he tells Hannibal and pets over his hand where it rests on Will's collarbones.

Hannibal lets out a soft laugh, and nuzzles Will's temple, purring so loud and strong it vibrates against Will's back.

"Forgive me, darling," he murmurs, and cups Will's neck. Even though Will is injured, Hannibal's touch doesn't hurt – it soothes and calms him, and he leans into it because he would never dream of implying that Hannibal's touch is ever unwelcome. "I cannot bear to leave you for a single second. I find the idea of separating from you, even to share in a successful hunt with my children, an impossible one."

Will smiles, and turns his head, and lifts his chin so that Hannibal might kiss him. "You brought him back to me," he says, because he knows Hannibal needs to hear it. He lifts his hand and flattens it across Hannibal's cheek, thumb brushing along the deep, dark circles beneath his eye that he knows were not there before this all started. "You were perfect, Hannibal, just like last time. I knew you wouldn't fail me."

Hannibal's eyes close, and he swallows so harshly that his throat clicks. He doesn't say anything, only tightens his arms around Will's shoulders and buries his face in Will's hair.

Will smiles, and lets Hannibal hold him, before a soft snarl draws his attention. Adam is on his hands and knees across his cousin's legs, and his mouth is red, from between his lips and teeth drip thick wads of bloody saliva. His back arches, he heaves, and shivers. Mischa and Shannon pet his hair.

"He ate too much," Mischa says, somewhat scolding, mostly concerned.

Will nods. "Go take your brother to the kitchen, get him some water. Don't worry about leaving anything behind – we'll be burning this place down when we leave."

They nod, and help Adam to his feet. Adam snarls, and kicks the corpse's ankle, spitting on it as he is pulled away. They leave, and Will rises, Hannibal helping him up. Will approaches Chris' body, the Alpha's wide, blue eyes staring straight at him, mouth agape to show his fangs, entire lower body, shoulders, and chest torn to shreds.

"Evisceration," Will murmurs. "Or does this count as simply gutting?"

"I'll take it as a victory, all the same," Hannibal replies, and takes Will's hand. "Do you think there are any others we need to worry about?"

Will shakes his head. "Lisa signed off on the land, but as a woman she wouldn't have been part of their…plans." He hisses the word, nose wrinkling. Soon will come the scent of a body relieving itself, every muscle losing the last of its strength. Chris will burn in blood and shit, the last thing he saw being Will, and Will's son, the perfect visage of his father.

He squeezes Hannibal's hand and looks up as the door to the basement opens, allowing Alana, Margot, and Morgan inside. Alana has her arms wrapped around Margot and Margot shrieks, flinches, and shields her eyes. Morgan does not – he stares, at Chris' body, at the two Alphas he and Adam took down together. Will watches him, and sees his upper lip twitch is something satisfied. Not pleased, he does not share any pleasure in the violence, the murder. But he is glad it happened the way it did.

"Adam's in the kitchen," Will says, and Morgan looks at him. His eyes widen, and his head tilts. "Go. I think he would feel better with you there."

Morgan nods, and skirts around the back of the couch, past his mothers. Margot reaches for him and grabs onto him tightly. "Are you insane?" she hisses. "They're murderers! They just -."

"If they are, then I'm one too," Morgan says, and jerks his arm back. "None of us have the moral high ground right now, mom, least of all me or you. I want to see Adam."

Will smiles when Margot's hand drops, and she looks at Morgan like she has never seen him before. Morgan presses his lips together, nods to Will, bows his head to Hannibal, and then hurries behind them, through the door to the kitchens.

Alana's face is pale, as she stares down at the bloody wreckage with the same emotion on her face that she had when she shot her gun. "Is it over?"

"I suppose that depends on your opinion of the whole thing," Will replies.

Alana huffs, and her eyes flood with tears. "Just like last time," she says, hard and angry, and glares accusingly at Will. "You seem to have a knack for getting others to die around you."

Will swallows, and Hannibal's hand settles on the small of his back, gentle and warm.

"We do seem to share similar bad luck, in that regard," Hannibal replies coolly. "I am sorry for your loss, Margot. I imagine Cordell was a trusted and loyal friend for much of Morgan's life."

Margot's eyes are cold and glassy, filled with tears, and she lifts her chin and rolls her shoulders. Her arms fold and she fixes Hannibal with a stark, severe look. Will straightens in answer; he will not be cowed.

"What happens now?" she demands.

Hannibal lifts his shoulder, and Will's eyes land on Alana.

"Shall I tell you what happened again?" he asks.

Alana's jaw clenches, and she shakes her head. "No," she replies. "I'll tell *you* what happened." She lets Margot go, and sets the keys down on the side table again, her fingers smeared with blood. "This…feral Alpha," she begins, and nudges Chris' leg with the toe of her shoe, "kidnapped my wife and child. For…ransom money, let's say. He said if I went to the police, he'd kill them, so what choice did I have?"

Will smiles. "You called an old friend."

"My capable friends," Alana says with a nod. "Both of them. And their family, all killers."

"How lucky, then, that this friend was in the country to handle his mother's estate." Hannibal's voice is soothing, and very warm. Will isn't sure whether he wants to collapse to his knees, or turn and sag into his Alpha's arms. He is, suddenly, so supremely exhausted.

"So that's it then," Alana murmurs. "If anyone comes by to ask. Judging from what you intend to do with the place, there won't be much evidence of our presence here anyway."

"And it's hardly the work of someone like the Ripper," Margot adds coldly.

Will blinks, his eyes widening, and he hears the children return from the kitchen. He looks to his son, and finds that Adam does look better, more relaxed and less pale. He is leaning heavily on Morgan, the other young Alpha's arm wrapped around his waist and supporting his weight. Mischa and Shannon flank them like guard dogs.

Hannibal's head tilts when Alana gasps. "What…what are you saying?" she asks, looking at Margot.

Margot nods to Adam. "Heard him say it to Chris," she says, and folds her arms across her chest. "Said it loud and proud; 'My father is the Chesapeake Ripper'."

Alana's eyes widen, and she goes very pale and looks to Will, as if she might see the truth on his face. Will intends on giving nothing away. "Morgan?" she whispers, and looks to her son instead.

Morgan lifts his chin, presses his lips together, his eyes cold. "I heard no such thing," he says flatly, no room for argument. Margot frowns. "You've gone a long time without medicine, momma. You were dehydrated and unwell. Maybe you were hearing things."

"Medicine?" Will asks.

Alana nods, and puts a hand on her wife's shoulder. "It's why she wears wigs," she explains, very softly. "Cancer."

Hannibal lifts his chin, scents the air. Says, "Oh," very softly.

"I know what I heard!" Margot hisses.

"I was just threatening him," Adam murmurs, flat and dull, as tired as Will feels. He has a cup of water in his hands and sips from it, shivering and bloody. "I wanted to scare him, wanted to make him rethink taking all of us. It was worth a shot."

"You did well," Morgan says, and turns and nuzzles Adam's sweaty hair, squeezing his shoulders. Adam smiles, a weak purr rumbling in his chest, and leans more steadily against Morgan's side.

Will is tense, unsure, now, what to do. It all hinges on Alana, he thinks – if things go badly, he knows he and Hannibal can escape with their children, but there is Adam's attachment to Morgan to consider, and Margot has proven she has the resources and drive to find them all.

Alana seems to realize this at the same time. She straightens, and gathers Margot close, taking off her own jacket and slinging it over her wife's thin shoulders. "Well, our priority now is putting as much distance between this Hellhole and ourselves as possible."

She exchanges a look with Hannibal, who nods, and turns to the children. "Mischa, my love, would you mind helping me with the fire? Shannon, take Will outside."

Will frowns. "What? No, I want to help."

Hannibal smiles at him, cups his face and rests their foreheads together. "Darling, I would gladly have you help me, but if you inhale any smoke, you or the baby could be damaged. And," he adds, silencing Will's hiss of protest, "I know you might not be feeling it right now, but your heart is racing. You need fresh air, and to be outside with our son."

Will swallows, and lets Hannibal touch two fingers to his neck, where his pulse is strongest. He can feel the pressure of Hannibal's fingers, feel his own blood pounding strong under his touch. Maybe Hannibal is right – Will shouldn't exert himself. Not now. His children need him.

He swallows, and nods, and lets Hannibal pull away from him. Will goes to Adam, and though Morgan had been clutching him protectively before, he releases Adam into Will's arms willingly, and Adam sags to him with a whimper, nose in Will's neck, and the glass he's holding falls and shatters to pieces on the floor.

"Mama," he groans, and he is burning hot, so very warm, and clutches at Will like Will is the only thing stopping him getting swept away by a strong river tide. Will wraps a hand in his hair, tucks Adam's face to his neck, and leads them all outside. They walk for a few yards, enough distance between them and the house to ensure they won't be caught by any smoke or errant spray of debris, and then suddenly Will cannot walk anymore, and neither, it seems, can Adam.

They fall to their knees and Adam whines, rolling onto his back as Will kneels beside him, checking his forehead for fever and making sure he isn't badly hurt. Adam's eyes are all-red, glazed and heavy on the bright, cloudless sky, his lips parted and showing the shine of blood on his fangs. His fingernails are bent back from clawing his way out of the cells, his palms have little pieces of broken glass and plastic in them, and he's filthy, covered in wet dirt.

For all the time they've been together, Will has only truly triggered a rut in Hannibal a handful of times, but he knows what an Alpha needs. Unfortunately, they don’t have anything to hand; nothing for Adam to bite on, to chew and destroy. Nothing for him to hunt – not even a room for him to scent-mark and prowl within to mark his territory.

A shadow falls over Adam, and Will looks up and meets Morgan's eyes – blue, threaded with red, his hair damp with blood and dripping down his bare neck and chest like melted candle wax.

Will swallows. "What happened to your shirt?"

Morgan presses his lips together, and looks down at Adam, and touches his hair so tenderly it feels too intimate to watch, and yet Adam quiets, and turns towards Morgan with a plaintive sound. Will shall have to ask what he was thinking, when it's over. Thankfully ruts do not last long.

"I gave him mine to chew on," he says.

Will lets out a heavy breath, surprised, a wide smile splitting his face. And then he laughs, and presses his hand to his mouth to try and stifle it. It's the kind of laugh that starts in the belly, and is powerful, shaking his shoulders. He is so *relieved*, so fucking relieved, and happy, and he can't do a single damn thing but laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.

Shannon's hand lands on his shoulder, and she kneels down and nuzzles him as Morgan gathers Adam into his arms, unafraid and not at all tense to have a rutting Alpha so close to his neck. Will can't help but look at them and see himself, and see Hannibal as he might have been at that age, and his chest hurts and his lungs ache.

"Mama," Shannon says. "Are you alright?"

He nods. It's all he can do.

"We have water in the car. I'll go get you some."

Will takes her hand, squeezes tightly. "Don't go alone," he says, irrationally afraid of watching her walk away and never come back. Misha is with her father, he knows Hannibal will defend her to his last, but Will just got his son back and he'll be damned if something happens to any of his family now.

"I'll go with her," Alana offers, and Will looks up to see her and Margot standing together, behind the boys.

Shannon growls. "I'm not leaving my mother alone with *her*," she says, glaring at Margot.

Margot's jaw clenches, her chin lifts, and Shannon stands. "Then I'll go with you," she says. Shannon's eyebrows rise, she looks Margot up and down, and then nods, and the two women turn away and head down the long driveway, through the grass, towards the car that still remains on the road. Will watches, his laughter finally quieting as he watches them go.

Alana sighs, and sits beside Will, wrapping her arms around her and shivering in the relative chill. Will would offer her his coat, but he doesn't think Hannibal would take too kindly to that. She still has her gun, tucked into her belt, and Will swallows and tries not to think how easy it would be for her to shoot them all right now.

They sit in silence for a while, waiting, watching without looking like they're watching. Adam and Morgan have gone silent, wrapped up in each other, their foreheads pressed together as Morgan pets through Adam's hair and lets Adam cling to him.

Alana swallows, and looks down at her nails, resting her hands in her lap. "I should have known," she whispers. She huffs a quiet, desperate-sounding laugh, and looks up, her eyes wet. "I should have known about all of it. You were so calm the night Jack died. I was so blind to think you didn't have anything to do with it."

"It was necessary," Will murmurs.

"*Why*?" she demands, and looks at him, finally. "Why did Jack have to die?"

"Because he *did*," Will snaps, and meets her eyes. "Because you don't know what it's like to be so *cornered*, alright? You've gotten a taste of it – just a taste, of what it's like to be someone like me, an Omega, forced over and over and *over again* to, *fuck*." He runs his hands through his hair and snarls, quietly. "My family sold me to Jack, and you have an idea now of what they're like. I've been passed from Alpha to Alpha my entire life, and even with Hannibal, I was *given* to him, signed off like a horse to serve master after master, but Hannibal is…. Hannibal is freedom, Alana. I'm *free* with him, to do what I want, whenever I want. I could leave him, or have children with him, or even attack him if I wanted to. I could do whatever I wanted, be whatever I wanted, and I couldn't do that with Jack. He would have never let me go."

Alana stares at him, and presses her lips together, looking away, at Margot's back. "I do know what it's like," she says quietly. "To…be under the whim of an Alpha."

"Do you?" Will demands.

"Yes," she replies. "I do. Mason was…"

Mason. Morgan's father. Will hums and sets his eyes on his daughter.

"We killed him, you know."

Will blinks in surprise, and looks at her again.

"Morgan knows. When Mason found out there was going to be a new Verger heir, he became enraged. Attacked Margot, and me. So we killed him. Shoved him into the carnivorous eel tank and held his head under until it had eaten him alive."

Will's eyes widen.

She looks at him, and a single tear falls, and she wipes it away. "I know what it's like to have to defend your family," she says harshly. "I understand the fierce, protective love a mother has. That you have, for your children, and for Hannibal. I understand it."

"I guess it doesn't take much pushing for anyone to kill," Will murmurs. "Under the right circumstances."

They hear footsteps approaching, and Will lifts his head, smiling in relief when he sees Hannibal and Mischa heading towards them. Hannibal returns his smile, and kneels on the grass behind Will, wrapping his arms around Will tightly while Mischa kneels beside him. The house has flames licking at the windows – it will take a while before the whole thing goes up, but Will trusts Hannibal's ability with fire as much as he trusts his skill with a blade.

Alana swallows, and asks; "Is it true, then?" She looks at Hannibal. "That you're the Ripper?"

Hannibal tenses, and meets her eyes. Is silent, before he says, "Consider, Alana, that it were true. What would you do, with that knowledge?"

Alana sucks in a breath, slow, her fingers flexing. Will is very aware of the gun at her belt. But she does not look at them – she looks at Morgan, and then away, to Margot. She presses

her lips together, swallows, and says;

"Nothing."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, one of his hands flattening over Will's swollen stomach. "Nothing," he repeats.

Alana nods. "I have no proof," she says. "Just the words of a rutting child and a woman who, while I love and trust her, is very sick and was very stressed." Her shoulders roll, and she looks between Hannibal and Will again. "I don't want the price of that truth to be my family."

"The truth, it is said, is what we make of it," Hannibal murmurs, his voice rumbling against Will's back. Will shivers.

"Here is my truth," Alana says. "I have known you both for a very long time. I know you are capable of violence…under the right circumstances. But I do not think my mentor is a monster, and I do not think my friend is capable of loving such a monster, if he were. And I don't think my son would love the child of a monster, either."

Will smiles.

"That's a good truth," Mischa says. "In a certain light."

Alana nods, and breathes out, rubbing her hands over her thighs. "Because of what Margot and Morgan did, your family suffered, and so did mine," she says. "Cordell is dead, and there is blood on all our hands, now."

"I wanted to stay here," Will says, and Alana looks at him. "Well, not *here*, here, but at the cabin. I wanted to come home, I wanted to be your friend again. I wanted all of the past ugliness to be washed away, and that is the truth, in every light."

She nods, and looks at their sons again.

Will swallows, and reaches out to her, and takes one of her pale, shaking hands. "Is that still possible, for us?" he asks, and in his chest is a fierce hope, untempered by reason. Whatever Alana was, or is, he has always loved her fiercely as a friend, and so he asks, and hopes, that she says 'Yes'.

More tears fall, and she presses her lips together and draws her hand away. "I can't promise you that," she replies. "But I can promise that, whatever happens, my family will not harm yours, if you swear the same."

Will nods. He can accept that.

"What happens now?" Alana asks. Margot and Shannon are returning, and Mischa stands, watching with stoic eyes.

"Now, we go home," Will says, and Hannibal nods. He covers Hannibal's hand on his stomach and squeezes, sighing. "And make sure nothing follows us there."

The drive is long, and they are all covered in blood, but by the time they make it back to the hotel, the day has turned to night and they slip in through the shadows, all piling into the one tiny room. Mischa showers first, then Shannon, then they coax Adam into the bath and Hannibal gets him clean before he takes his own shower, and then Morgan cleans himself up as well. While he does, Will goes to a discount clothing store that is still open and buys them all clean clothes and blankets, after changing his jeans so he doesn't have any visible blood on him. The cashier eyes his neck warily, but doesn't comment.

They change, and Hannibal takes their bloodied clothes and leaves for a long time. When he comes back, he smells like ash, and tells everyone that the car is clean. Margot and Alana sleep on one bed, Mischa and Shannon on the second, Morgan and Adam piled between the beds under a blanket.

Hannibal covers Will on the couch, his nose to Will's nape, his arms wrapped tightly around him. Will can taste the relief on his mate's skin, feel it in every touch, every shaken exhale, and the room stinks of it. It is soothing to smell him like this, so relieved and so thickly etched with joy that he cannot help feeling it himself.

He doesn't sleep. Neither does Hannibal. They keep watch over the children and the women, and make sure nothing follows them here.

The next morning, Adam wakes up, and his rut is over. Will can smell the change in his scent, from the lighter notes of an unpresented Alpha to the heavier, thick scent of a matured male. His eyes have a ring of red in them, just like his father's, and his scent has taken on hints of Morgan's, entwined deeply, lime and mint and sugar.

Margot and Alana take Alana's car, with Morgan. Adam, Mischa, Shannon, and Will and Hannibal take the second. Mischa is in the front seat, Shannon driving so that Will and Hannibal can rest, too exhausted to safely drive.

Will has Adam wrapped up in his arms, his face tucked to Will's neck as he sleeps, overcome with post-rut exhaustion. Hannibal has a hand on Will's thigh, understanding Will's need to scent his son, to reassure himself that Adam is alive and okay. They drive for a long time, over the Louisiana border, through Mississippi and Alabama, into Tennessee and finally Virginia. They stop at another McDonald's for food and Will watches as his family stuffs their faces with cheap burgers and their weight in chicken nuggets and fries. Adam sits penned in by his sisters, Morgan on his other side, Hannibal keeping Will close and Alana on his other side, and Margot heading the wide booth.

They go for bathroom breaks in shifts, and at one point it is just Adam and Will, and Will reaches across the table and takes his son's hand in both of his, and Adam shivers, biting his

lower lip, and lifts his eyes.

"Are you okay, baby?" he murmurs.

Adam nods, lips twitching in a smile. "Yeah," he says, and wipes his face with his free hand. "Just tired."

Will nods. He understands completely.

Adam's eyes fall to his neck, and darken. "Who did that to you?" he asks, and nods to the fading bites and claw marks on Will's neck and arms. "Chris?"

Will swallows. He has never lied to his children, never tried to hide the truth from them, and yet the idea of telling Adam what his father did seems like a bad one. Still; "No," he says, and shakes his head.

"One of the others?" Adam demands.

Will sighs, and shakes his head again, and squeezes Adam's hand. "No, baby. I asked your father to do this to me."

Adam's eyes widen, the ring of red in them flaring and thickening very suddenly. He snarls. "*Why*?"

"It was the only way to get inside without raising an alarm," Will says, and tries to keep his voice low and calm to counteract Adam's anger. "I begged him to. An injured Omega is far less suspicious than a healthy one." Adam snarls again. "You mustn't be angry, Adam."

"You told me he would never hurt you," Adam growls. "But he did."

"Because I asked him to." Will watches his son, watches the anger darkening his eyes, smells the rising sharpness of rage in him, and cocks his head to one side. "Do you think I'm weak?"

Adam blinks, and frowns. "Of course not," he replies sharply. "You're the strongest person I know."

At that, Will smiles. "My cousins never thought so. They thought all Omegas are weak, simpering things, only meant for breeding and that's if they were pretty enough." Adam's upper lip twitches, curls back. "Your father has never thought me weak, either. Not once. But sometimes, there is a certain way to look at the world, and sometimes taking advantage of that view is the only way to get the upper hand."

Adam regards him, and his head tilts, and he sighs, rubbing at his face again. "Everything's… blurry, my memory of what happened," he murmurs. "But I remember…Alana said you'd done this before. He'd hurt you before."

Will nods. "Because I asked him to."

Adam frowns. "I don't understand."

Of course he wouldn't. Will didn't raise him to be a brute, and Hannibal has never given him that example. He sits back in the booth, rubbing his hand absently over his stomach. "Tell me something," he says, and Adam meets his gaze. "Morgan." Adam's eyes flash. "You trust him?"

Adam nods, once, sharply. "He was with me," he says.

"Even after everything he's done? You do know what he did, didn't you?"

Adam nods again. "It's his fault all of this happened," he says darkly. "His and Margot's. They called it off and it happened anyway, but I believe him when he says he didn't want it to. I trust him with my life, because he kept me sane, and he helped me when I had no one else to help me."

Will smiles. "Your father did the same for me, a long, long time ago." Adam's face softens, and he smiles. "Now, imagine there was something that needed doing, and to do it, one of you had to get hurt. I'm not going to ask you if you would do it, but if you would let anyone *else* do it."

Adam frowns, and tilts his head.

"I needed to look injured," Will says, and sits forward again, taking Adam's hand. "I could have asked Alana to do it, or one of your sisters, or gone out to a bar and let some foreign Alpha rough me up, but I didn't. I asked your father." He swallows, and says, "Can you see why?"

Adam blinks, and licks his lips, his fingers curling as he bows his head. Then, he nods. "Yeah," he murmurs. "I can…. Yeah, I understand."

Will smiles. "Good," he says, and kisses Adam's knuckles before letting him go. "I'll hear no more about it, then. We can just put this whole mess behind us and go home."

"But we can't just put it behind us, can we?" Adam asks sullenly, meeting Will's eyes. "I mean, I can't…Morgan and I…"

Will sighs through his nose. "I don't know, baby," he says gently. "Maybe."

Adam swallows, and nods, drawing his hands back and resting them in his lap. Mischa and Shannon return, then, Alana and Margot close behind. Will spies Hannibal emerging from the Alpha bathroom, Morgan in tow. The two of them stop at the entrance, and appear to be in quiet conversation. Will can't read Hannibal's mouth from this far away, but Morgan appears relaxed, unafraid and also not challenging. He meets Hannibal's eyes quietly while they speak, and then he nods, and Hannibal nods as well, smiles, and squeezes his shoulder.

Will stands, and they all pile out and head back towards the cars. "Margot and I are taking Morgan home," Alana tells him, once the children are in the cars.

Will swallows, and nods, unable to hide his sadness.

"We will be at the cabin," Hannibal says, his hand on Will's back. "And our doors are always open to you. To all of you," he adds, looking at Margot. "Perhaps it is not impossible to remain friends."

Margot wraps her arms around herself, bites her lower lip, and nods. "Perhaps," she echoes, and turns away.

Alana gives them a weak smile, and climbs into her car, into the driver's side. Their children are all in the backseat and Hannibal and Will get into the car, turning onto the Interstate and heading North, towards the cabin. At some point Alana's car turns, and exits early, towards Baltimore. They drive on.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> I'm so sorry this took so long my darlings! I had holidays with fam and then I was out of town and then hit a really low period, emotionally, but I'm clawing my way back. I hope you like the chapter <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes three days until Will can bear to let Adam go. He sleeps – though 'sleep' is a generous term – in the children's room, surrounded by his daughters and son, and Hannibal, his back against the door and Mischa's head on his thigh as he pets her hair. It, still, doesn't quite feel real. Will can taste the ash in his mouth from the house fire, when he closes his eyes he can see the way Mischa snapped her first man's neck, and in moments of silence he can hear Chris' gurgling breaths as he'd struggled through his last moments on his Earth. He feels the warmth of fresh blood on Adam's hands, on his cheek when he kisses him, can feel the heat of Shannon's broken nose and smell Mischa's blood.

The days pass, become a week, and then into a second, and the bite on her neck is healing well – all of them are healing well. Will's wounds fade, as do Hannibal's, and that of their children. Hannibal no longer limps, Shannon's face is no longer so swollen and the dark circles under her eyes are half the size, and Adam has a new ring of red around his irises that will never fade as long as he lives.

He hears nothing from Alana, or Margot, or Morgan. Every morning there are no new tire tracks aside from what Hannibal and Mischa leave when they go for groceries. They don't hunt. At night they lock each door and window and Will sits in the hallway between his children's bedroom and his own and watches the darkness outside until dawn.

It is mid-morning, now, in the living room, and Will looks up when a shadow falls across his periphery. His stomach turns when he sees that Hannibal has brought him breakfast, he swallows and waves away the scent of eggs and bacon, clutching his swollen stomach and wincing. Hannibal pauses, and then sets the plate down, taking a seat next to Will with a sigh.

"My love, you must eat," he murmurs.

"The smell," Will complains, waving it away again. Hannibal catches his hand, bringing his knuckles to his mouth for a light kiss. Will manages a weak smile, turns into his mate and nuzzles Hannibal's neck gently.

"You must eat," he says again. "And you haven't been sleeping – don't think I haven't noticed."

"I wouldn't dare," Will replies with a laugh, pulling back to brush his nose along Hannibal's jaw in a placative gesture. It makes Hannibal purr, if only a little. His fingers tighten around Will's and his other arm settles around his shoulders. "I just…can't. I close my eyes and I see…"

He trails off, and swallows.

Hannibal is silent, for a moment, and then he stands, taking the plate of food with him. Will watches him go, brow furrowed, as Hannibal disappears into the kitchen, and then goes upstairs. The loss of him from Will's sight makes his stomach heave in distress and he lets out a low whine, fingers flexing on the sides of the couch.

He turns his eyes outward, to the porch, where his children are all gathered around the little iron table. They are laughing, curled up together to ward off the persistent chill of the biting wind. How long it has been, since he was out there, with Hannibal, discussing the children that were only a distant hope at the time, with heat coloring his eyes and driving him to distraction whenever Hannibal spoke or smiled. Things were so much simpler back then. There existed only themselves, not even Jack's shadow looming so close to threaten their happiness.

He is startled out of his thoughts when Hannibal returns, and his mouth twitches in a smile as he sees, in one hand, their Chess board. In the other, Hannibal has brought a bowl of grapes and banana slices. He sets them down and Will reaches for a grape as he sets up the board.

"What are the rules?" he asks, nibbling idly at the large green grape before sliding it whole into his mouth, crushing it between his molars.

"Questions, and honest answers if I take a piece," Hannibal says with a smile. "And, if you take one, you will let me touch you."

Will raises a brow. "You don't need to play Chess with me to earn my touch," he replies.

At that, Hannibal lets out an idle hum. "Forgive me, darling, but I feel like I do," he says. Will frowns, tilting his head. "You have, rightfully, been so caught up in the relief of our children's safe return that I…"

He stops, and sighs, and returns his attention to the board. Will is playing white, as he always does.

He reaches forward, covering Hannibal's hand with his own, and doesn't move until Hannibal raises his eyes. "I'm sorry," he murmurs, and he wants to say something else, anything else, but the words get stuck in his throat.

Hannibal smiles, and turns his head to kiss Will's cheek. "I understand," he replies quietly. Then, he nods to the board, and Will sighs, scratching the back of his neck idly. He moves the King-front pawn forward one space and Hannibal moves his King-front pawn forward two.

Will rubs a hand over his face, forces himself to smile, and eats a banana slice before he wipes his fingers clean on his thigh and moves his King-side Knight over the row of pawns,

towards the center. "Of course you understand," he murmurs, watching as Hannibal brings his Bishop forward until it and Will's Knight sit along the same line. "You always understand. I bet a part of you even understands what Chris was doing."

"It isn't that complicated a mindset," Hannibal says mildly. "He was conditioned by archaic views that Alphas are the protectors, the providers, and the dominant species. That their sole purpose in life is to be lord and master of those that are 'weaker', in an effort to protect and control them."

Will's upper lip curls, his fingers flex. "Protect and control," he repeats, and moves another pawn forward to threaten taking the Bishop.

Hannibal makes a soft, amused sound. "Feeling aggressive today, darling?"

"I don't really feel like playing right now," Will mutters, watching as Hannibal frees up his second Bishop by moving the Queen-front pawn forward one space. Will has been playing with Hannibal for years, he knows now how to look ahead two moves, five, ten, until the final destination. He knows he already lost by moving his Knight before its time.

"We don't have to," Hannibal says.

"Clearly we do," Will replies, and lifts his eyes to meet Hannibal's. His head tilts. "I wonder if you realize that you're trying to trick me, or if it just comes naturally to you now." Hannibal's mouth twitches up at the corners, his eyes shining with restrained mirth. "Am I amusing you?"

"You have a habit of lashing out when you're dealing with powerful emotions," Hannibal says mildly, and Will huffs, nostrils flaring, and leans against the back of the couch. His head tilts when Will settles and rests a hand over his stomach. "My goal right now is to help you understand your emotions, so that we can work through them."

"Work through them," Will repeats, and he feels like a parrot. One that might spit acid. He eyes the Chess board, and eyes the bowl of fruit. Then, he looks out to the porch. The children are still there. Safe. Happy. "And what, exactly, is your diagnosis, doctor?"

Hannibal lets out a quiet, disapproving noise, and Will winces, and turns to face him again. Even after twenty years together, he has never liked fighting with Hannibal, and every argument they've had that turned into more than a brief spat, well, he can count those times on one hand.

"I think you are suffering from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder," Hannibal says plainly, his eyes on the board. "Hypervigilance, loss of appetite and sleeplessness, pulling away from…" He swallows, and lifts his chin, closing his eyes in a blink that lasts just a little too long.

"Your diagnosis is flawed," Will hisses. "I'm not traumatized."

Hannibal sighs, and meets Will's gaze. "My love -."

"There's no sense reasoning with someone who is in no mood to be reasoned with," Will snaps. Shows his teeth. "I'm not interested in playing games, or mincing words. We went through an ordeal, as a family, and honestly got the best outcome we possibly could have in the circumstances. So, we're fine. I'm *fine*."

Hannibal regards him for a long moment, his jaw clenching subtly, nostrils flaring in an exasperated exhale. His eyes drop to Will's hand on his stomach. "I never thought I'd have to sit and listen to you deny yourself, and your true feelings, ever again," he says, voice so quiet, so sharp, it slides it like a knife between Will's ribs.

Will turns his head away and looks at the board instead. His stomach clenches up, heavy and tied into an angry knot under the weight of Hannibal's helpless disappointment. His eyes burn – it might be gold, might be tears, he can't tell – and he wipes his free hand over his mouth. He hasn't shaved since Adam was taken, his facial hair is becoming itchy and too long for his liking.

Unbidden, memories come to him when Hannibal shaved him, when he was half-mad with heat – in the kitchen behind them. His hands, so warm, so large and soothing, around Will's throat, across his forehead. His chest pressed to Will's hair, his hips to Will's back. Had that day gone differently, Will would have begged to be knotted over the kitchen island right then.

His hands are shaking.

"I have a question for you," he says, and sees out of the corner of his eye as Hannibal lifts his head. "Right now, in this moment, how do you feel about me? Truly. Every layer of it. Every facet."

Hannibal is quiet for a moment. Then; "I am frustrated," he says. Will smiles – he expected that much, at least. "I want to ease your mind, clear your thoughts of all troubles. I want to… touch you, so desperately, and I know you would let me." Will looks at him, finds his eyes dark, so dark, all-black. "I am deeply concerned, not just for you, but for the small, fragile life you carry, and your mind is still a thousand miles away, in that farmhouse. I love you, as fiercely and strongly as I have always loved you. That will never change."

Will's smile widens. "You want to protect me from myself?"

"You don't need protecting, Will. You never have."

Will's head tilts. "I've been thinking a lot about what Alana asked me," he says. Hannibal blinks, the darkness in his eyes clearing somewhat. He leans in, sensing openness in Will, an eager sponge for Will's words and feelings – something he can take, and examine, and return with diamond clarity. "She asked me why Jack had to die. What he had done to deserve it. And the truth is…he didn't do anything wrong. Certainly nothing as bad as my own family, in the grand scheme of things. Nothing as bad as what we've done in terms of morality."

He sighs, and Hannibal makes a soft, encouraging sound. "Why, then?" he asks.

Will's shoulders lifts, and fall. "I think he died because I wanted him dead. Because I could. Chris died because I wanted him dead. The people we killed, we killed because I wanted to.

Because we could." He presses his lips together, meets his mate's eyes. "You would have stopped, wouldn't you? If I'd asked you to. If I told you 'No, no one else, you don't get to kill anyone else', you would have done it."

Hannibal's mouth twitches. "You would have never asked that of me."

"Of course not," Will replies. "But that's not the point."

"No," Hannibal breathes. "It's not the point." Then, "Yes. I would have tried."

"Free will is a funny thing," Will says. "One might argue I shaped my own future. By agreeing to that therapy. By allowing you to work your designs on me. By running away with you and bearing your children. The other side of that coin is that I never had any free will at all, that it was all you. And I feel myself caught between each side, wondering which way it will fall when it's done spinning."

Hannibal nods, once. "Maybe it will always spin," he says. "One of those marvelous dichotomies of life."

Will smiles, his eyes dropping. He reaches for the Chess board and picks up the black King, holding it in both hands. His fingertips trace the little cross on the top, slide down the ridges of it, until he holds it tight in one hand.

"Chess is a game," he murmurs. "A battle. And we won. We won the fight, we won the war. *I* won."

Hannibal nods, and moves a little closer on the couch. Says, very quietly; "Before it even started."

Will closes his eyes, and shivers. "Then why do I feel like this?"

The tension in the room is palpable, and makes Will feel like a static-covered cat; prickly, vibrating with energy. His knuckles whiten around the Chess piece, he opens his eyes and stares at Hannibal's hands. Hannibal's fingers flex, and he reaches out, gently taking Will's hand and prying the piece free, setting it down. His fingers slide up Will's wrist, Will so sensitive that it burns him and makes his hand twitch.

Hannibal's other hand cups his chin, makes him lift his eyes. "You were robbed of the catharsis of killing your abuser yourself," he says. Will wants to snap at him, tell him that Chris was many things but giving him the power of calling him Will's abuser is too much. He remains silent. "You gave that honor to your children and kept none for yourself." His head tilts. "Perhaps what you need right now is not gentleness, not sanctuary, but blood."

"You gave me a bouquet of sanctuary," Will murmurs, smiling, and thinks of the woman the Ripper hollowed out during their courtship, the Queen Anne's Lace and the Protea flowers. "Do you remember?"

Hannibal smiles, and nods.

"She was beautiful," Will says. "I knew, then. I knew you loved me then, or at least that you were capable of it."

Hannibal blinks, and his smile widens, and he lets out a quiet purr.

"I'm going to show my love to you, as well," Will says. He leans in, lets their noses brush, and rests their foreheads together. Hannibal sags to him like the strings holding him up have been cut, his hand falling from Will's chin to his neck, cupping gently, his other one tightening on Will's wrist. "You're right. I need blood. I need to prove that I can provide for my family."

He sighs, and brushes gentle fingers down Hannibal's cheek. "I need to do this alone."

Hannibal pulls back, frowning. "Will -."

"You said I'm the most dangerous of all of us," Will says before he can argue. "Was that just words?"

"Of course not," Hannibal says. "I know you are. You have always been – your nature, your mind, they are unparalleled."

"So you can't mean what you say and still think I need you with me when I hunt."

"My desire to be close to you cares not for the situation, my love," Hannibal replies coolly. "I can believe it, and still want to be in your company."

At that, Will smiles.

"I have to do this on my own," he says. Gently, but with no room for argument. He has never had to ask Hannibal permission for anything and he's not about to start now.

And Hannibal knows this. He breathes out, and cups Will's face with both hands. "Who will you choose?"

"I have the perfect person," Will replies, and smiles when Hannibal gives him a curious look. "You'll see."

She's a screamer, but that's alright. Where they are, no one is going to bother them. Will found the perfect place – isolated, far away from most people or thoroughfares. Her scent is disgusting, bitter from the start like the aftertaste of a badly-mixed gin and tonic, but now it's so sour with fear that it makes his stomach turn. Bad meat – a waste of blood and breath and some other poetic shit Hannibal would undoubtedly spew as he watches Will cut into her.

"I don't want you to misunderstand why I'm doing this," Will tells her mildly. "I actually admired you, for a time, or at least put some stock in your theories and essays. The Reactionary Theory you posited was inspired."

Her eyes are watery as she stares up at him, a fringe of blood around her face. Her hair, grey before, is now red. He doesn't rob her of her clothes – his goal isn't to debase her like that, not while she's still alive.

After, well. Maybe there's something worth eating, but he doubts it.

He straightens, admiring the sheen of blood on his knife. It's one of Hannibal's, the edge serrated on both sides, with a sharp backwards curve at the tip. He walks behind her, looks at the way her wrists are digging into the ropes around her arms, trying to pull herself free.

"I have a lot of questions for you," he says, and kneels behind her, his chin on her shoulder. She sobs, lifts her shoulders, tries to push him away from her neck, and he smiles, wraps his free arm around her stomach and pulls her back against him. "I think it'd be a lot of fun to pick your brain, but I've already been away from my family for long enough."

"Please," she whispers, and Will huffs, standing again and circling to face her from the front. "Please, I can -. Whatever you want, just let me go."

"Whatever I want, hmm?" Will asks, and cocks his head to one side. "And what is it you imagine I want?"

She looks up at him, eyes wide and tear-filled. He smiles.

"You have no idea what I want," he says. "Because you don't know me. You don't know anything about me, and how could you? You're the same woman who thinks that Omegas will pair-bond with their children if their Alpha dies. You're the one who thinks that Omegas are incapable of violence."

She sobs again, and lifts up onto her knees. There's blood staining the front of her shirt, from little cuts Will has made all along her collarbones, testing her pain threshold. She started crying before he even cut into her.

He crouches down, and tucks the curved tip of the knife beneath her chin. "Tell me something," he says, and she presses her lips together, quivering, more tears falling down her face. "Do you think I'm enjoying this?"

She blinks, eyes widening, and looks at him. For a long time, before she shakes her head.

"No," she replies, shaken. "I've done something to wrong you, and this is just…revenge."

Will laughs. "Revenge," he repeats. Well, he supposes that isn't far off – Will was denied his pure justice, and now he's seeking it elsewhere. "But isn't revenge by its nature meant to be enjoyed?"

She sobs, crumbling in on herself, and Will straightens again, rolling his eyes. This is starting to bore him – hunts aren't nearly as entertaining without Hannibal by his side, he's found.

He sighs, and with a final step forward, he fits the knife under her jaw. "Goodbye, Doctor Greystone," he says, and slashes her throat with one quick motion, stepping back before he can get too much blood on him. It coats his lower legs and his shoes, and his hands are red,

but those are things easily taken care of. He's brought a spare change of clothes, and gasoline – he will burn the evidence and her body and leave nothing but a heap of ash for anyone to find, when and if they do.

She stares at him, wide-eyed, as she bleeds out, and her carcass slumps to the floor with a sodden noise. Will sighs, and wipes his knife on her hair. She smells awful, too bitter and sour to eat anything from, but that's alright. This wasn't about food.

He imagines the M.E. and investigators trying to figure out the 'why'. He imagines it will take them the rest of their lives.

When he returns to the cabin, the hour is very late. Every door and window is closed and locked, he lets himself in and goes to the kitchen, finds the rest of the grapes that Hannibal put away and eats them all. He eats a banana, and then rolls up slices of lunch meat and eats those, too. His appetite has returned, and his stomach aches happily when food is introduced.

His head snaps up when he hears movement, and looks over his shoulder, on alert until he sees it is Hannibal. He smiles, purring loudly as his mate approaches him, and happily burrows into Hannibal's arms. Hannibal embraces him tightly, a fine tremor in his hands as he nuzzles Will's windswept hair.

He breathes in, and lets it out in a laugh. "I know that scent," he murmurs.

Will smiles, and lifts his head for a kiss. "She was a lean and delicate pig," he replies. "But not worth eating."

"How did you find her?"

"She was lecturing at a University in Virginia," Will explains. "It wasn't hard."

Hannibal nods, and draws back so Will can see his face. He looks tired, the kind of bone-deep tired that shows more in the eyes than on the face. Will sighs, wipes his fingers clean, and cups his mate's cheek with a gentle hand.

Hannibal leans into it, a smile flitting across his face.

Will's head tilts. "I think my mother would have liked you," he says. Hannibal blinks at him, straightening, his hands flat and firm on Will's sides as he draws him close. "He never had a great love for Alphas, but I think he would have liked you."

"I would have liked to meet him," Hannibal replies. "If only to see the kind of man who had raised you." He sighs, and cups Will's face, leans in and steals another kiss. "I have missed you, darling."

Will smiles, and doesn't say he was gone for scarcely a day. He doesn't say that it's silly to miss someone after so short a time – because it's not, and he understands. "I missed you, too,"

he replies. "Hunting isn't as fun without you there. But I think I needed it. I needed to prove I could do it on my own."

Hannibal smiles at that, his eyes brightening from their exhausted black. Will leans in and kisses him, pulling him closer, purring when he finds Hannibal eager to go.

"She begged for her life," Will says, growling it against Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal purrs in answer, clutching Will, his hands flattening wide and warm on Will's hips and pushing him against the counter. Will shivers, pawing at Hannibal's arms, thighs spreading just a little to give him more room. "Told me she'd give me whatever I wanted if I let her go."

Hannibal laughs, and nuzzles Will's neck, a fissure of warmth spreading down Will's back from the light touch of Hannibal's lips to his throat. He hasn't felt his mate's touch in weeks, and now it aches, *God*, it aches. The last time Hannibal held him like this was in the hotel room before they'd gone to rescue Adam, and even then it hadn't been about lust, it hadn't been about intimacy – just need, pure and simple, the ravenous need to be close and be warm.

"She can't give you what you want," Hannibal growls.

Will smiles, turns his head and presses his nose to Hannibal's jaw. "Can you?"

Another growl, Hannibal's hands flexing on Will's sides. It's not a challenge, Will knows he doesn't take it as one. But Hannibal pulls back, nips sharply at Will's neck, and then rests their foreheads together.

"I can only try," he replies, and Will smiles. That's a good answer. "What do you want, darling?"

Will's smile widens, his eyes go heavy-lidded, and he purrs, arching forward and gasping when Hannibal pushes against him in answer. He's strong, physically larger, large enough to cover Will completely, and Will's stomach tenses up, he *aches*. "I want you," he says.

Hannibal's shoulders roll, he shivers, and leans in for another kiss that Will eagerly answers. Then, he gasps, his eyes widening as Hannibal drops to his knees abruptly, his lips on Will's swollen stomach as his hands wrap into the waistband of his jeans and underwear and tug down.

Will's eyes widen, and he moans sharply as Hannibal pushes his shirt up, revealing the outward curve of his stomach, and then he ducks his head, purring, his hands flattening on Will's thighs, and sucks the head of Will's cock into his mouth. Will's hands fly to his mussed hair, tightening as Hannibal takes him down in a smooth swallow, engulfing his cock in wet heat.

"*Fuck*," Will hisses, pleasure rushing up his spine in a heavy wave. He clenches up, slick already at the scent of his Alpha, the hot clamp of Hannibal's throat muscles around the head of his cock as he sucks Will down, pulls back, takes him all in again. Hannibal's hands grab him, spread him, forcing him to thrust forward so he can get as deep as possible before Hannibal pushes him back. Will makes no move to control the pace himself, lets Hannibal

move and suck him as he likes – long, languid pulls into his mouth, and back out, until Will feels a hint of teeth at his cockhead.

Will growls, bites his knuckles so he doesn't get too loud, his other hand still roughly tugging Hannibal's hair. It feels so fucking good, and Hannibal looks wonderful on his knees, his lips quickly turning pink and then red, swollen and slick. Will's thighs tremble, his eyes burning with gold, his throat tight.

"Hannibal," he whispers. "Please."

Hannibal pulls back with a loud, wet sound, one hand circling Will's cock and stroking, slow and tight. He looks up, teeth bared in a smile, his eyes bright and red. "What do you want, darling?" he purrs, and his throat is hoarse and Will whines, shows his teeth in return, and tugs on his hair.

"You," he snaps. "Here. Right now."

Hannibal's eyes flash, and he surges to his feet with a low snarl, tugging on Will's hips and turning him around so he's pressed over the kitchen counter. Will groans, bowing his head forward, shivering when Hannibal's teeth sink into his neck. *God*, it feels good, and then Hannibal's fingers are between his thighs, dragging up through his leaking slick and pushing inside – two, thick and hard, shoving into him to stretch him out.

"*Fuck*, yes," he whispers, arching back as best he can to get Hannibal deep inside him. He aches, to his core, desperate to have his Alpha inside him, needing it. "Please, Hannibal, *please* -."

Hannibal snarls, and Will hears a rustle of fabric, and then his fingers retreat and flatten on Will's hips, and Will gasps, covering his own mouth with one hand as Hannibal mounts him. He pushes in slowly, so fucking slowly, and Will's body spasms around him, needing more, until Hannibal is all the way inside and he groans, loudly, into the palm of his hand.

Hannibal is purring, his chest vibrating strongly against Will's back, and he digs his nails into Will's bared hips and pulls at him, like he needs to be deeper as well. His legs are shaking against Will's – they both might collapse at any given moment.

Will lets his mouth go, reaches back and clutches at Hannibal's hair. "Please," he whispers, and Hannibal growls again, opening his mouth wide on the back of Will's neck and biting down. Pleasure rushes down Will's spine, makes him tremble and bow, both hands now planted on the counter so he can rut back as Hannibal starts to thrust.

"So eager," Hannibal breathes, nuzzling Will's hair. One of his hands slides forward to wrap around Will's cock, stroking tight and slow in time with his thrusts. "I feel as if I can't possibly get deep enough into you, my love. I can feel how much you want me."

Will nods frantically – it's true, it's true. Just like his hunger, his need for Hannibal is rearing up strongly, so desperate for the press of his Alpha; his hands, his mouth, his knot. He pushes back, tightens around Hannibal as much as he can just to hear him snarl.

"I think if I wasn't already pregnant, I'd be in heat for you right now," he says, honestly. He feels heavy with it, it's swimming through his brain and drowning out all else. Hannibal lets out a quiet, desperate sound, tightening his hand around Will's cock and fucking in harshly. Will moans; "Fuck, Hannibal, *please*. Knot me."

Hannibal growls, ready, wanting, and bites down on Will's shoulder as he fucks in, yanking Will back onto him as tightly pressed as they can be. He ruts in and Will whines, dropping his hand to join Hannibal's on his cock, stroking quickly as he feels his mate's knot begin to swell. They lock together and Will whimpers, tightening up, and Hannibal tugs on his shirt so that it covers his cock and he spills into the fabric, avoiding making a mess on the kitchen counter and cabinets that they will have to clean.

Will sags, panting, and Hannibal goes with him, pressing him against the edge of the counter, covering him as he bites and knots and floods Will's body with his seed. It's a heavy, viscerally satisfying sensation, even as Will's swollen muscles ache sharply at the huge knot. He hasn't been knotted in too damn long, for it to hurt like this.

Hannibal lets out a soft noise, nuzzles the latest bite in a way that makes Will shiver, body clenching up to coax another flood out of him, Hannibal's knot rutting up against his prostate so that Will is trembling, unable to stand without the counter and Hannibal's help.

He sighs, and smiles, purring, and tilts his head back so Hannibal can lick and nip at his neck. "Thank you," he breathes.

Hannibal huffs a small laugh. "My pleasure, darling," he murmurs, thick with mirth, and cups Will's swollen, wet stomach. Then, very quietly, he says, "I'm glad to have you back with me."

And Will knows he's not just talking about the hunt.

"I'll never leave again," Will swears, vows it as solemn as a confession. Hannibal's arms tighten, and Will closes his eyes, breathes in deep, and turns his head for a kiss.

They are all out on the porch, enjoying an unseasonably warm day, when Hannibal's head perks up, and his and Adam's eyes snap to the driveway. A car is approaching, that Will recognizes as Alana's, and he frowns, standing, all of his children following suit, at attention.

The back door opens before the car is even at a full stop, and Will's eyes widen when he sees Morgan scrambling out, slamming the door shut. Adam lets out a happy cry, and their eyes meet, and then the two Alphas are running to each other. They collide with an audible *thump*, embracing tightly, Morgan's nose in Adam's hair as they embrace.

Despite the fact that Will has no idea why the fuck he's here, he smiles.

Alana and Margot emerge from the car at a much more subdued pace. Will's frown deepens, though he tries not to let it show, and his family walk over to greet them. "This is a surprise," Hannibal says mildly, one hand on Will's shoulder, the other holding Mischa's hand tightly.

Alana gives him a weak, if genuine, smile. "Can we talk?" she asks, holding Margot's hand. Will can hear Adam, purring loudly, and turns to see him nuzzling Morgan, clutching him tightly. Morgan's scent is sweet with joy, pure and genuine, hugging Adam and petting his hair as he lets the younger Alpha nuzzle and scent him.

"Of course," he says, and gestures for them all to go inside. They all enter the cabin, closing the window-door behind them, and Morgan and Adam immediately go to the couches, where the Chess set, Will notices, is still set up. "Can I get you anything to drink?"

"Water is fine," Alana says, and Margot nods along. She doesn't seem happy to be here, but she's not outright hostile, so Will counts that as a win. He nods, and leads the way into the kitchen, Mischa following as Shannon goes to the couches – either to chaperone or to just hang out with the boys, Will isn't sure, but he's glad she's there. He knows better than most how much trouble young Alphas can get into on their own.

He gives Margot and Alana a glass of water each, and then takes one for himself. Alana sits on one of the bar stools and Will takes the other, turned towards her, Hannibal at his back and Margot at Alana's. Mischa is on the other side of the counter, like an intermediary for a debate.

Alana takes a drink, and gives Will a smile. "You look well," she says.

"You too," Will replies, nodding. He looks to Margot, then back to Alana. "What can I help you with?"

Behind him, Hannibal makes a quiet sound of encouragement, and rests a hand on Will's shoulder.

Alana clears her throat, and pets through her hair. "Right. To the point," she says, and sounds almost nervous. "We need to talk about Morgan."

Will's head tilts.

"Cordell had been teaching him, training him to fight, giving him lessons on all kinds of things, but he's…gone, now, and Margot and I have full-time jobs that mean he doesn't have, really, anything to occupy him all day, and I don't want to give up my practice and Margot has the expansion to oversee, which Morgan will help with once he's eighteen." She hesitates, and takes another drink.

Will frowns. "You think he needs a babysitter?"

"We want to offer you both a job," Margot says sharply. "Whatever you both are, whatever you've done, the fact of the matter is Adam wouldn't have been able to get himself out, or my son, or do anything helpful to what…happened…without your training."

Hannibal hums, and Will looks up at him. "You want us to train Morgan to fight?" he asks.

"We want you to teach Morgan how to be…self-sufficient."

Will huffs. "Forgive me, but I think you're both more than capable of doing that yourselves."

Alana smiles. "Not like you can," she says gently. "The Verger empire is vast, and Margot understands it. I don't. I understand how to look at how people think. Margot doesn't. And neither of us know what the world is like for Alphas and Omegas."

Will frowns, and looks between them.

"There's an opportunity here for something of mutual benefit," Margot says, setting her water down and folding her arms across her chest. "Maybe if Morgan and I knew about Alphas the way you do, we could have seen the whole shit with Chris going down, but we didn't. And that's on me – it's on both of us. But the fact of the matter is whatever Chris wanted meant taking Morgan too, and *I* didn't save us. Alana didn't save us. *You* did, your whole family did, and that's an asset I can't ignore."

Will's mouth twitches in a smile.

"You want to keep an eye on us," Hannibal says coolly, though he's smiling.

Margot grins, and shrugs, unapologetic.

"You want us to be Morgan's tutors, then," Will says.

"It's a rather neat arrangement, don't you think?" Alana replies. "I'm sure you're not hurting for money, but it would ensure a permanent residence, and…protection. The bureaucratic kind, should you need it. And I don't think anyone can ignore how taken our sons are with each other."

"Ah, young love," Hannibal says kindly. Alana smiles.

"You don't have to make this decision now, of course," Margot says. "But if you wanted to, we'd invite you down to the estate, or have Morgan stay here for a time. And if anyone is interested in learning about how to run a huge conglomerate, well." She shrugs again.

Mischa straightens, her eyes on Will.

Will nods to her, pressing his lips together. "We'll have to discuss it," he says, and they nod. "You're welcome to stay for dinner, provided we shouldn't expect any additional guests."

Alana laughs, weakly, wincing. "No. No additional guests."

"Excellent."

Adam is, of course, overjoyed at the idea of spending more time with Morgan, and agrees to it immediately. His scent holds hints of the other Alpha now, merging together like a truly bonded pair, and Will doesn't have the heart to separate them. He thinks, misguided though he was, he can appreciate Morgan's need to defend and protect his family. It's a powerful instinct and one he holds dear, and can be used to great advantage when tempered with reason and logic.

"I think it'd be cool," Shannon says. "I mean, she's crazy, but Alana seems cool. And okay with the whole 'murder family' thing."

"And," Adam adds, "we wanted to stay here. You said so yourself."

And that is true; Will can't deny that. He knows Morgan on his own isn't a threat to them, he knows Morgan has a strong affection for Adam and wouldn't want to hurt him. Alana, too, seems content to try and repair the bridge of friendship, and Margot, well, Margot will come around, or she won't, but as long as she doesn't try to pull any kind of stunt as she did before, Will sees no reason they cannot achieve some kind of harmony.

"I can't stay," Mischa says gently. "I'm sorry, mama, but England is my home now. I don't want to leave it."

And Will understands, though it aches in his chest to think of his daughter being so far away.

"You can't live your life just to please me and your father," he tells her. "But if you ever need anything, you know where we are. You can keep the house in England, if you want it."

They agree that Morgan will spend the weeks up at the cabin with them, and on the weekends Adam and Shannon will go down to stay with Alana and Margot. It's a good arrangement, even if it feels strangely like Will and Alana are sharing custody of their children. Will knows it won't be easy, constantly worrying about his children when they're all out of the cabin, but Hannibal and his own body is quick to remind him that he has another one on the way that will soon steal all of his attention.

It's practically perfect, a deep satisfaction in knowing he's getting everything he wanted – his son is happy, has a potential mate and second family who love him, his daughter has taken to Alana quite strongly and seems interested in learning about the Verger empire and how the whole business works. Mischa sends them emails every other day or so, and postcards from when she and her boyfriend go to Spain for the summer vacation, and has promised that they will both visit during the next school break.

"I feel like I'm in a dream," he tells Hannibal, when he's almost too heavy with child to do much of anything, and gets tired very quickly. Morgan has proven a capable pupil, and even better at observation exercises than Will's children were, though when it comes to sparring he has a lot to learn. Hannibal is more than happy to teach him.

Hannibal smiles, and kisses him deep and passionate. "I will kill the man who wakes you," he promises, and touches Will's stomach with reverence and love.

Will smiles, purring softly, and nuzzles his mate's neck. "You'll have to get in line."

At that, Hannibal laughs, and joins Will in looking out onto the porch, where Adam and Morgan are training how to fight. They've both filled out over the last few months, each of them strong, capable Alphas in their own right, and Will can't help but look at them and see himself, and his mate, as they might have been all that time ago. It is at once looking at the future and the past, and he smiles widely.

"I think we did good," he says, cupping his stomach.

Hannibal hums, and kisses his cheek. "I think so too, mylimasis." Will shivers, feeling a press against his stomach when Hannibal's hand flattens over his own, the baby kicking out against the pressure and warmth.

"Do you want to know what this one is?" Will asks.

Hannibal tilts his head. "You know?"

He nods.

"Tell me."

Will smiles. "An Omega, they think."

Hannibal pauses, and then the air breaks with a loud, rumbling purr. Will tilts his head, closing his eyes when Hannibal kisses him deeply. "An Omega," he breathes. "And he will be the most beautiful, dangerous creature to ever walk the Earth." Will shivers. "Just like his mother."

Will rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. "Flatterer," he murmurs. Hannibal doesn't argue.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so emotional about this, thank you to everyone who left comments, kudos, bookmarks, rec'd the fic, and everything else. You guys make shit like this possible for me and I don't know where I'd be without you. See y'all in the next fic! <3

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